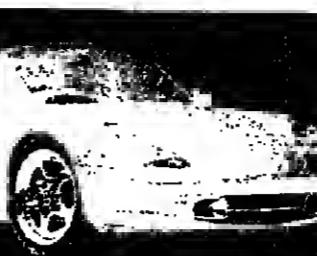




Revealed: the storms that swept Saturn

Page 3



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Universities face huge cash review

Biggest inquiry for 30 years

JUDITH JUDD and
DONALD MACINTYRE

Ministers are considering setting up the most far-reaching inquiry into higher education for more than 30 years. The move comes as university vice-chancellors hold an emergency meeting today to discuss whether to impose a £300 levy on new students.

The inquiry would ask fundamental questions about the expansion of universities and how to fund them. It would be conducted along the lines of the Robbins Committee, which led to a dramatic growth in student numbers and the building of new universities at the end of the 1960s.

So serious are the current funding problems that even Oxford and Cambridge have refused to rule out top-up tuition fees for students. If introduced, the top-up charges would be significantly higher than the £300 entrance fee the vice-chancellors are to consider at their meeting in London today.

In the Commons on Tuesday, John Major made clear his strong opposition to such fees and claimed that state funding of universities had increased by 23 per cent in real terms over the last five years.

The likelihood of a full-scale, independent, Robbins-style inquiry, an option now being actively considered in Downing Street and at the Department for Education and Employment, could partially turn on the outcome of today's meeting of the vice-chancellors. A decision to impose entrance fees could make the establishment of such a committee a more urgent proposition.

With the proportion of 18-year-olds going into higher education now standing at nearly a third, politicians of all parties are searching for politically acceptable ways of reducing the £1bn of taxpayers' money spent on higher education, without electorally disastrous consequences.

The new inquiry would question whether further expansion is sensible, and if so, by how much, what the impact would be on already worrying levels of graduate unemployment, how the quality of higher education can be maintained and improved, and above all, how universities would be paid for in the next century.

Politically, student financing is the most controversial and sensitive issue such an inquiry would tackle. At present, grants are being phased out and students

who would have lent the money, refused to take part. However, ministers have not abandoned hope of producing a privatised student loan scheme.

Next Wednesday, Eric Forth, the Minister for Higher Education, will speak at a conference to publicise a paper from a Tory manifesto group, which advocates privatisation. A decision by Oxford and Cambridge to charge fees would be highly controversial, since wealth would clearly become one of the criteria for entry to the two most sought-after universities.

The fact that both have said previously that they would not charge top-up fees shows how the climate has changed since the Government's Budget announcement that it was cutting capital grants to universities by 50 per cent over three years.

Vice-chancellors are divided about the introduction of the £300 levy, with some arguing that universities should not penalise students because of their argument with the Government.

The fee would be a one-off charge to students who did not qualify for full grants, and would raise between £40m and £50m per year.

If the 100-plus vice-chancellors who meet in London today fail to agree, some of the best-known universities might consider introducing their own fees.

A key political advantage in up an inquiry would be removing the burden from the Government of having to answer these dilemmas ahead of the general election.

Mrs Shephard has been conducting a review of higher education for more than a year, but Downing Street is unsatisfied with the results and a publication of even a consultative paper listing options for higher education reform has been delayed.

Before Christmas, the Government was forced to defer plans to partially privatise student loans, because the banks, dents take our loans to help pay for their living costs. Tuition is free, at present, and ministers are nervous that any proposal to introduce loans for tuition fees might alienate middle class voters.

A spokesman for Cambridge said: "In the past we have been formally opposed to top-up fees but this is a very difficult situation and we are keeping our options open."

Lionel (later Lord) Robbins, a professor at the London School of Economics, recommended that anyone capable of benefiting from university should go and that the proportion of students in higher education should rise from eight to 17 per cent. His committee on higher education sat from 1961-4.

Leading article, page 18

Ministers have ordered the rail franchising process to be speeded up so that the whole network can be privatised before the next election.

They have told Roger Salmon, the Franchising Director responsible for privatising passenger trains, to "review" his timetable with the aim of bringing forward the letting of remaining franchises, to ensure the whole process will be completed by next spring.

Selling off the franchises quickly will give the Tories a pre-election boost and pose problems for Labour if it wins the election. With Railtrack, the three main railfreight companies and the 13 large rail maintenance companies due to be sold this spring, little will be left in the public sector by next year.

Record-breaker: Cézanne's 'Smoker' being hung at the Tate in London yesterday. The exhibition opens Wednesday

Photograph: Tony Buckingham

Entire rail network to be sold before election

CHRISTIAN WOLMAR
Transport Correspondent

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A rail industry source said: "They want this as the flagship of their privatisation policy." The remaining franchises are the least desirable, taking in the heavily loss-making rural network of Regional Railways.

There are complications about the structure of services in metropolitan areas where services are subsidised by local passenger transport executives controlled by Labour councillors. Some in the rail industry doubt the sale can take place at breakneck speed, as the relationships between the PTEs and the franchising director have not been sorted out.

After a three-month delay, the Government has appointed a new chairman for the rail watchdog, the Central Rail Users' Consultative Committee. David Bertram, 62, was formerly chairman of the Eastern England watchdog.

REBECCA FOWLER

The art world has dubbed it

Cézanne fever. An exhibition of works by the French artist known as the "father of modern painting" has attracted the biggest ever advance ticket sales in Britain, which are moving at

3,000 a day.

A total of 24,000 tickets have

already been sold for the exhibition at the Tate Gallery, which

was hung yesterday. The artist, whose career began

ignominiously when he failed

his entrance exams to art

school, has now outstripped

the record holder, ten times over.

According to the Tate, interest in the exhibition is unprecedeted. It has moved from Paris, where 642,000 tickets were sold. "It's been so talked about since it opened there, and it's sold so much excitement."

said Damien Whitmore, head of communications at the Tate.

"Cézanne is really coming into its own, it's so accessible and it's so beautiful. It also shows how interested people are in the visual arts."

The exhibition is also ex- pected to attract a bumper trade in Cézanne merchandise, including jugs, pots, books, CD-Roms, bottles of wine – with labels that reproduce paintings by the artist – and tea towels.

Although he was one of the most influential painters of this century, and described by Matisse as a god, Cézanne enjoyed little success in his own, reclusive lifetime. John Golding, the artist and curator, said: "It's very poignant, and the other interesting thing is that he would have hated all these artists who were so influenced by him. He would have been appalled by Picasso."

Millionaire throws US election wide open

DAVID USBORNE
Manchester, New Hampshire

The multi-millionaire political novice, Steve Forbes, threatened yesterday to re-write the script of the US presidential election by taking a comprehensive opinion poll lead in New Hampshire, scene of the crucial first primary later this month.

A new poll in the state showed the Republican Senate leader, Robert Dole, long considered the Republican favourite to challenge President Clinton in November, falling nine points behind Mr Forbes.

The poll, published by the Boston Globe and a Boston television station, gave Mr Forbes the support of 31 per cent of Republican voters and Mr Dole 22 per cent.

One poll last week showed Mr Forbes edging ahead but another showed Mr Dole still in the lead. Much may change before voting day on 20 February. But the Boston Globe poll provides new evidence that Mr Dole, 72, may suffer a devastating crash landing.

Forbes maintains tremendous momentum. He continues to grow as the Dole campaign

basically collapses," said Gerry Chervinsky of KRC Communications Research, which conducted the survey. He warned, however, that support for Mr Forbes remained fragile and could quickly ebb away.

Mr Forbes, son of the flamboyant magazine publisher, Malcolm Forbes, has jammed the state's television stations with aggressive advertising, paid for from his own pocket and much of it targeted at Mr Dole.

His most vaunted proposal – to replace the entire US tax code with a single-rate flat tax of 17 per cent for all individuals

and businesses – is losing some of its earlier support.

One potentially serious threat to Mr Forbes surfaced yesterday, with a report that the Federal Election Commission is questioning whether his campaign has taken thousands of dollars in illegal contributions from his publishing empire.

Forbes Inc, Mr Forbes has been funded entirely by his personal fortune.

But New Hampshire voters beginning to focus on the election for the first time, are turning away from Senator Dole in

droves. They point to concern about his age – he would be the oldest first term President ever and his lacklustre reply to Mr Clinton's State of the Union address last week.

Campaigning in New Hampshire in the last few days, Mr Dole has barely mentioned Mr Forbes. But questioned by reporters about his rival, he noted: "It's like a new restaurant opening and everyone rushes down to see what they're serving, but then they find that the gravy isn't that good."

Dole stumbles on, page 12
News analysis, page 17

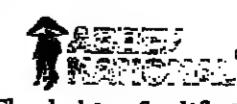
Steve Forbes: 'Maintains tremendous momentum'

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IN BRIEF

Brittan blast over EMU
Sir Leon Brittan today attacks his former Cabinet colleagues for suggesting a European single currency might never happen.

Report, page 2

Interview, page 19

Horse racing accused
The horse racing industry funds research which results in the death of mountain ponies, a report claims.

Page 3

Senna's boss faces manslaughter charge

DERICK ALLSOP

Frank Williams and Patrick Head, the two senior officials of the Williams Formula One team, are expected to be charged in the next 10 days with manslaughter following the inquiry into the death of their driver, Ayrton Senna, at the San Marino Grand Prix 21 months ago.

The public prosecutor in Bologna is about to announce the conclusion of his investigation into the accidents which killed Senna, three-times world champion, and the Simtek

driver, Roland Ratzenberger. It is understood the prosecutor will ask for two-year jail sentences to be given to Williams and Head, but that a form of plea bargaining could result in no more than suspended sentences.

According to Italian sources, a number of "participants", including the director of the circuit at Imola, the Autodromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari, also face charges.

The case is due to be heard by one of Italy's lower courts and would probably not be scheduled until late next year.

However, since it is anticipated prosecution and defence lawyers would follow a widely used procedure within the Italian legal system and reach a mutually acceptable settlement, the likelihood is that the case will be in and out of court before the next San Marino Grand Prix, on 5 May.

The Italian sources say that Williams and Head have no previous convictions and that even in the event of a guilty verdict, there is no danger that they would be sent to jail.

Early reports from Italy claimed the inquiry would con-

clude that the steering of Senna's car broke while he was leading the race, leaving him powerless to prevent its crashing into a wall at the Tamburello curve. Williams has repeatedly refused to comment about the possibility of his facing charges.

Ratzenberger died during practice, 24 hours earlier, but it had already been stated that his accident was a consequence of his own mistake. Even so, officials of his team may have to answer charges because the car did not withstand the impact.

The drivers' deaths were the first in a Formula One race

section
ONE

BUSINESS 20-22 COMMENT 18,19 CROSSWORD 28 GAZETTE 16
LEADING ARTICLES 18 LETTERS 18 NEWS 2-15 OBITUARIES 16
SHARES 23 SPORT 25-28 UNIT TRUSTS 24

section
TWO

ARTS 8,9 CLASSICAL MUSIC 14-16 CROSSWORD 33
JOHN LYTTLE 7 LISTINGS 20-25 METRO 18,19 POP MUSIC 10-13
REVIEWS 9 TELEVISION & RADIO 26-36 WEATHER 33

On Sale Now

Brittan berates the EMU Jeremiahs

PATRICIA WYNN DAVIES
Political Correspondent

Sir Leon Brittan, vice-president of the European Commission, today makes a strong attack on former Cabinet colleagues for suggesting that a European single currency might be postponed or never happen.

Writing in today's *Independent*, a former Conservative Cabinet minister, firmly disputes predictions that the project will collapse – an

idea that Cabinet ministers have conspicuously invoked in a attempt to reassure Tory Euro-sceptics and restore a semblance of party unity.

Malcolm Rifkind, the Foreign Secretary, has been quick to seize on the suggestion of a growing gap between economic realities and the planned 1999 timetable for monetary union. John Major has also played down the prospect of the timetable being met.

Sir Leon in effect dubs them

"wifish thinkers". British industrialists and citizens were being told "we do not need to think about it any more, for the deadline and the terms are unravelling, just as the British always said they would," he says.

Yet most EU foreign ministers officially re-endorsed the plan to begin EMU on 1 January 1999, and according to the economic criteria in the Maastricht Treaty, at their meeting on Monday.

"It is consoling to be told that

you not need to answer a difficult question but it can be dangerous to duck out of it that way," he says. "Sound policymaking requires a much less self-serving view of what is really happening in Europe."

Sir Leon's warning will not only reassure increasingly exasperated pro-European Tories. It will also strike a chord with a number of senior Tory back-bench Euro-sceptics who are far from convinced that EMU is unravelling and believe predictions

to that effect are dangerous. Kenneth Clarke, the strongly pro-European Chancellor, insisted in an interview earlier this week that nobody knew whether the currency would go ahead on 1 January 1999. He also slapped down suggestions from Cabinet colleagues that some states wanted to water down the economic criteria.

The contributions from Mr Clarke and Sir Leon stand in marked contrast to Mr Rifkind's strident remarks at a

Brussels press conference during Monday's meeting, when he said: "Each day almost senior European statesmen from France, from Germany, from other countries express doubt or uncertainty as to whether 1999 is a realistic target. I doubt if this can go on day after day, week after week, without some serious credibility problem."

Douglas Hurd, the former foreign secretary, has also called for a postponement of moves towards the currency, saying

that the present timetable could cause damage to the EU.

Sir Leon suggests some countries would welcome a short delay, but only because they wish to join at the outset rather than in a second wave.

"Yet even they are enacting bold economic reforms to show they mean to qualify for participation at the earliest possible date... Those reforms are in any case necessary for Europe to be competitive."

Sir Leon Brittan, page 19

IN BRIEF

Law on sex tourism to be reviewed

The law preventing British tourists from dealing with paedophiles who attack children abroad is to be reviewed because of concern over the tourism industry.

The review of the Sex Tourism Bill, on the eve of the Second Reading of a Bill to tackle sex-tour operators, Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, was under pressure to act after 10 other Western countries, including Australia, Germany and the United States, changed their laws in response to concerns about child prostitution.

But yesterday David Maclean, the Home Office minister, called on countries with such problems to do more themselves. "They must put the protection of their children above the lure of dirty tourist money they receive from the sale of children's bodies," he said.

Computer fraud

Two men who orchestrated Britain's largest-ever computer leasing fraud and then hid their gains at a record £10m each, were sentenced at Southwark Crown Court. Leonard Barlett, 49, chairman of the ICS Group, and finance director, Ian Mackintosh, 40, were jailed for five and three-and-a-half years respectively. At least £1m was lost.

Murder charge

Police hunting the killer of Vicki Thompson, 30, who died a week after being attacked as she walked her dog near her home at Ascott-under-Wychwood, Oxfordshire, last August, have charged a man, 21, with her murder. He will appear at Witney magistrates' court today.

IRA appeal fails

Felim O'Hadrhain, an IRA member who was jailed for 25 years in 1994, lost a High Court appeal against his conviction. He claimed the jury was pressured into convicting him on a conspiracy charge instead of one of possessing explosives.

Double stabbing

Detectives investigating the killing of Eveline Oxtoby, 61, and her daughter, Lynn, 30, who were found stabbed to death outside their home in Borthwick, North Yorkshire, on Wednesday applied to magistrates to keep a suspect at longer in custody.

£1bn lottery grants

The amount of National Lottery money paid out to projects across the United Kingdom tops £1bn today with an award of £2m for a renovation project in Northern Ireland.

Loud return for Fluff

The veteran disc jockey Alan "Fluff" Freeman, 68, is returning to rock music after 10 years. Freeman – whose catch-phrase is "not art" – is to present a new classic rock show on Virgin Radio from next month, and he will be playing it loud because he says years of rock monsters such as Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin have left him deaf.

Probation officers

Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, has been accused of acting unlawfully when he scrapped qualifications for probation officers. High Court judges will rule at a later date.

Correction

The National Heritage Memorial Fund has asked us to point out that it was not the fund but the Arts Council that made a grant of £55m to the Royal Opera House.

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Village in mourning after fire kills three

Part-timers perish after wrongly thinking child was still trapped

TONY HEATH

A South Wales valley was in mourning last night after two part-time fire fighters and a five-year-old boy died in a blaze at a house in Blaina, Gwent.

Kevin Lane and Stephen Griffin lost their lives after going back into the terraced house in Zephaniah Way, wrongly believing that another child was trapped in the inferno.

Fire crews had been called to tackle a blaze at the house early yesterday morning and the two fire fighters had forced their way through choking fumes to carry the boy out.

They went back inside after being wrongly told that a second child was trapped upstairs. They were on the landing of the two-storey council house when a massive explosion threw them to the ground floor.

The men, who both lived in the village, suffered severe burns and were pronounced dead at the scene.

Mr Lane, 32, was a factory worker and Mr Griffin, 42, was a chef at Blaina Hospital.

Daniel Harford, whom the crew had pulled from the blaze, died from smoke inhalation on the way to hospital in Abergavenny.

His mother Catherine Harford, 24, and his three-year-old

brother, Joshua, escaped unharmed.

The volunteer fire fighters were yesterday praised for their bravery by Terry Glossop, Gwent's chief fire officer.

"Tragically, there was no one else in the house but these two colleagues did not think for one minute of their own safety before doing their duty and going back into the building," he said.

"Firemen everywhere will understand why they went back inside and they will be very disturbed by this tragedy."

Last night relatives were comforting the men's families.

Mr Griffin, a retained fireman for five years, leaves a widow, a daughter aged 17, and a 20-year-old son.

Mr Lane, who had volunteered for duty because of staff shortages, leaves a partner, a 10-year-old son and a stepson, 20.

His brother-in-law, David Bishop, said: "Kevin was absolutely devoted to the job and never considered how dangerous it can be."

Residents in Zephaniah Way

also praised the bravery of the fire fighters, who are being considered for bravery awards.

Wayne Warren, 42, said of the men: "They were so brave to go in the house. It was like an inferno. But they risked everything - I've never seen courage like that."

Other residents described how flames and thick black smoke had already engulfed the building when the fire fighters arrived. Seventy-two-year-old Iris Lane saw one of the fire fighters desperately trying to revive Daniel on a blanket in the garden. "The house was all gushing smoke and sparks. It was terrifying," she said.

Another neighbour, Rob Edwards, in pyjamas, tried to get into the house earlier but was forced back by heat and smoke.

"I heard Catherine screaming 'Daniel, Daniel, be in there, please get him out!' Catherine was standing in the garden and was blackened from head to foot," he said.

A spokesman for Blaina Gwent Borough Council said last night that all the authority's houses were fitted with smoke alarms. Tenants were contacted regularly to remind them to check that the alarms were in working order.

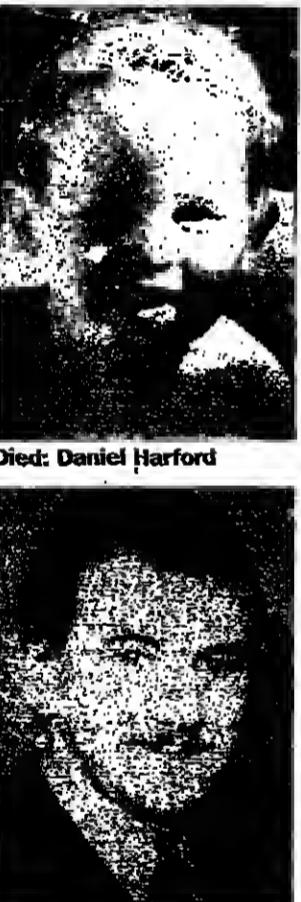
Flags at the council's offices were flown at half mast and will stay lowered until the victims' funerals. Bernard Assinder, who represents Blaina on the council, said that the tragedy was reverberating throughout the area.

"We are such a close-knit community - virtually everyone knows those involved. People do not always appreciate the debt we owe to those who man the emergency services. Those who died today exemplified that debt."

Shopkeepers yesterday opened a collection to aid the victims' families as investigations began into the cause of the tragedy.

Meanwhile, Blaina fire colleagues remained on duty last night ready to respond to emergencies.

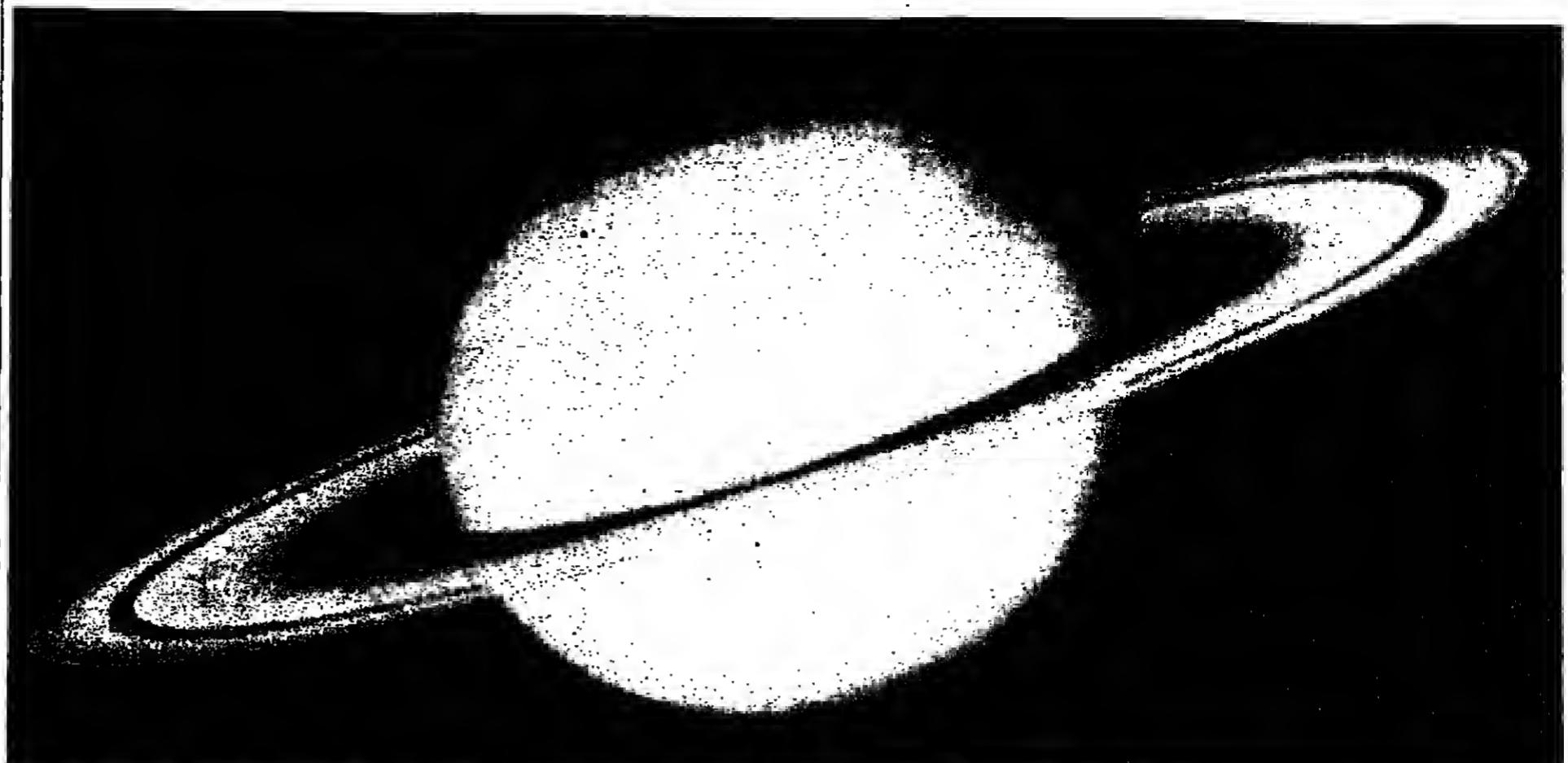
Station Officer Chris Brown said: "If there is a call-out we will go as always. Everyone here is dedicated to the job and that is what we do."



Died: Kevin Lane

Died: Stephen Griffin

Star-gazers track storms that scar Saturn



Out of this world: A Hubble Space Telescope image of Saturn showing a white spot near the equator - a massive storm cloud wider than Earth itself. Photograph: Science Photo Library

TOM WILKIE
Science Editor

Storms on the planet Saturn, whipping up winds of nearly 600 miles an hour, have been seen by an international team of astronomers.

Previously, observers of the ringed planet had thought that such storms were rare. Only five large-scale disturbances have been seen over the past century - with those in 1933 and 1990

resulting in Great White Spots near the planet's equator.

But in an impressive display of international scientific cooperation, five Earth-bound telescopes in four countries - together with the Hubble Space Telescope - have been trained on Saturn over the past couple of years. In today's issue of *Science* magazine, the astronomers report that Saturn may be a much stormier place than had been believed.

Fly-bys of the planet by the Pioneer and Voyager satellites more than 15 years ago had revealed some activity but the general presumption was of a quiescent system. The research published today shows that Saturn's atmosphere is more turbulent than first thought, and that sources of heat internal to the planet may be more active than astronomers had believed.

Most of the observations were taken with a French telescope

specifically dedicated to studying the planets, at the Pic-du-Midi Observatory in the Pyrenees. But the project also involved optical telescopes in Florida, Japan, Spain, a NASA infra-red telescope, and the orbiting Hubble Space Telescope. Between July and December 1994, the astronomers tracked a large storm consisting of a cloud pattern of small and large white spots. The success of the white spots - one measuring 20,000km by 12,000km - raced across the planet's northern hemisphere at about 274 metres per second. A small white spot, was followed closely by the main storm but bad in its train - an elongated dark feature

which was in turn followed

by a smaller white spot.

"According to our images, the 1994 event does not fit into the classical Great White Spot cloud pattern. The spot was still visible, albeit much smaller, 11 months later in May 1995. The persistence of the white spot against wind shear (which will destroy cloud patterns in a few days) was unique," the astronomers write, "suggesting the white spot was a coherent, dynamically stable structure."

Ponies 'die in scientific research' for race horses

GREG WOOD
Racing Reporter

The horse racing industry regularly funds scientific research which results in the death and suffering of Welsh mountain ponies, animal rights protesters will allege in a report to be published next week.

Animal Aid, citing scientific reports in veterinary journals, will argue that live horses, usually ponies bred for research purposes, were used in experiments to develop vaccines against equine influenza and equine herpes virus. The ponies are also used to study the effects of exercise on surgically-induced injuries.

Among the contributors who fund the experiments are Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, the world's leading racehorse owner, and the Horserace Betting Levy Board, which administers the £50m raised each year from tax on bets placed in betting shops.

Andrew Tyler, Animal Aid's director, has written to Sheikh Maktoum asking him if he is "fully aware that funds provided by yourself would be used to cause the unnecessary death of horses".

A statement issued yesterday by the Sheikh's Dalham Hall Stud in Newmarket said: "Sheikh Mohammed has made donations to a number of research projects and is satisfied that their aim has been to improve the health and welfare of the entire equine species."

Sheikh Maktoum is an honorary vice-president of the Animal Health Trust in Newmarket where several of the studies were carried out. His financial assistance is acknowledged by the authors of a report into the progress of equine herpes virus-1 (EHV-1) to the respiratory tract of ponies.



Mohammed Maktoum leading his Derby winner Lammtarra

Twelve ponies and two seven-month-old foals were infected with the virus and killed between 12 hours and 13 days later to recover tissue samples.

The Animal Health Trust denies it is responsible for "unnecessary" deaths, as Animal Aid claims. "Since 1994 we've had an ethics committee which includes a JP and a member of the RSPCA and any work we want to do will be put in front of them," Phil Spiby, the AHT's

spokesman, said yesterday. "Wherever possible we will use alternative methods such as cell cultures, or look at the broader picture through epidemiology. At present, there are no terminal studies taking place."

Many of the experiments are designed to develop or refine vaccines for strains of EHV and equine flu, both potentially fatal diseases in horses. Equine flu regularly appears in new forms which render previous vaccines

useless. As a result the development of vaccines, the use of which is mandatory in British racing stables, is an ongoing process. The final test for any new treatment is a "challenge" study, in which vaccinated horses are exposed to the virus in question.

While some of the experiments carried out on healthy horses for the benefit of the industry may be justified on medical grounds, studies into problems of purely economic concern are a particular embarrassment, not least because the Levy Board does not allocate any of its substantial budget for the welfare of retired racehorses.

Tendon injuries are a frequent source of expense and frustration throughout the industry, often ending a horse's career or forcing it to spend a year recovering. In a study at Bristol University, funded by the Levy Board, to investigate the effects of exercise on healing, injuries were surgically introduced into the limbs of healthy ponies, which were killed for tissue analysis 11 weeks later.

"Diseases like equine flu can be very serious in an unvaccinated population," Mr Spiby said. "Two years ago there was an outbreak in China which killed 50,000 horses. That could never happen in Britain because of the number of vaccinated horses."

Some trainers, however, dispute the value of the vaccines. Josh Gifford, who trained Aldaniti, the 1981 Grand National winner, is a long-standing critic of the policy of mandatory vaccination.

"It's an absolute waste of time," he says. "The horses still have flu, but it crushes it and it sticks inside them. They look well but you've got to do blood tests and scope them to see if there's any muck down there."

Police in Northumbria said they had contacted Interpol

and the British Embassy in Cairo but they did not know whether a supermarket owner who sold the wine to Mrs Common had been questioned.

There was no word, either, on whether the wine was part of a batch or whether that batch had been tested and destroyed.

The Foreign Office said it had not been asked to make approaches for help from the Egyptian government. A spokesman said that he had no advice for British holidaymakers.

No one was available for comment at the Egyptian Embassy yesterday because of the observance of Ramadan.

Interpol inquiry as wine kills British tourist

STEVE BOGGAN and
VERONICA CLARK

Interpol is investigating the death of a British woman who collapsed in Cairo after drinking wine thought to have been laced with methanol spirits.

Holidaymakers were yesterday warned to avoid cheap Egyptian bottles in what could turn out to be the most serious drinks scare since 1986, when 23 Italians died after drinking adulterated wine.

Charlotte Common, 55, died on 9 January, almost a week after being airlifted to Newcastle's Freeman hospital on a life support machine.

"Someone, somewhere, is responsible for my mother's death," said Gregg, 34. "We must find out what happened there."

"We don't want to take a law suit out against anyone, we just need to know the truth."

"Other tourists travelling to Egypt should know they too may be risking their lives drinking the local wine. It has been a nightmare for our family - we don't want anyone else to go through this."

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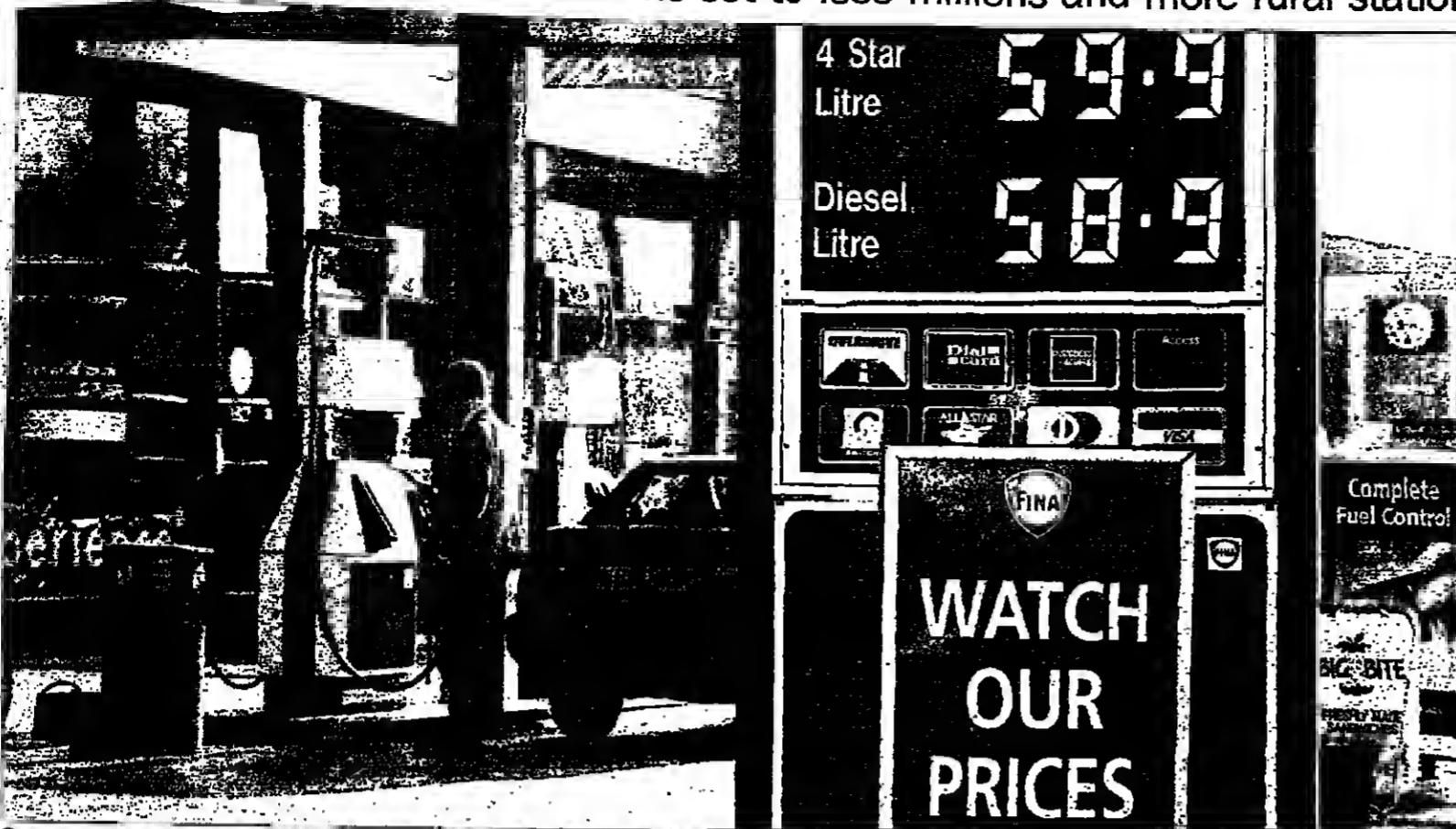
No one was available for comment at the Egyptian Embassy yesterday because of the observance of Ramadan.

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Forecourt price war: Store chains set to lose millions and more rural stations may close in fierce competition at the pumps



Consumer boon: Esso's decision to reduce the price of petrol at its garages has forced supermarkets to follow suit

Photograph: John Lawrence

Profits evaporate as petrol battle hits supermarkets

NIGEL COPE

The petrol price war sparked by Esso two weeks ago is already having a damaging impact on the supermarket groups which between them account for 22 per cent of the UK market.

The first evidence of the pain emerged yesterday when a leading City broking house said profits at Sainsbury, Tesco, Asda and Argyl, owner of the Safeway chain, would be lower than expected. Lower petrol sales were cited as a major reason for the downgrading.

According to NatWest Securities, the price war will cost Tesco £12m in profits next year and Sainsbury, Asda and Safeway together around £20m.

Mike Dennis, an analyst at the broker, said: "It is a very volatile market. Things could get very interesting if someone decides to cut another penny per litre off their prices."

He warned that if the latest

round of price cuts continued, particularly those in rural areas, would be forced out of business. Up to 2,000 of the UK's petrol stations are expected to disappear this year anyway. It is possible that a further 2,000-3,000

pledged to match the lowest prices within a three-mile radius. The rival Shell and BP groups followed and prices have fallen to as low as 49.9p per litre. The most severe price cuts have been in the North-east and Scotland. In other areas prices are as high as 56.9p per litre.

Paul Sykes, president of the Independent Petrol Retailers Association, which represents 5,000 smaller petrol stations, said: "If prices continue like this 45 per cent of the industry will go out of business within 18 months."

The largest supermarket groups make a significant amount of their profits from selling petrol. Tesco makes about £70m a year while Asda rakes in £30m.

Sainsbury, Tesco and the other chains have boosted their shares of the market by selling petrol at significantly lower prices than major oil companies such as Shell, Esso and BP.

NHS 'fails to tackle' crippling disease

LIZ HUNT
Health Editor

More than half of all health commissions in the UK are ignoring government advice on osteoporosis, a crippling bone disease which blights the lives of hundreds of thousands of middle-aged and elderly people, it was claimed yesterday.

The first nation-wide survey of the availability of screening, treatment, and prevention strategies for osteoporosis has revealed widespread failure to tackle the problem, despite its high profile on the national health agenda.

A total of 12 per cent of commissions admitted they were doing nothing at all to manage osteoporosis, while a further 42 per cent provided a minimum service only for their populations.

Only 12 per cent of health commissions are meeting Department of Health targets of at least 600 bone scans for the disease each year. However, although 55 per cent said they had access to a bone scanner, less than half of these were funding scans.

The National Osteoporosis Society, which conducted the survey, in which 80 per cent of health commissions – formerly health authorities – took part, said that a year after the Government's Advisory Committee on Osteoporosis issued a blueprint for the management of the disease in the NHS, 62 per cent of commissions did not have an overall strategy for tackling it. Fifty-seven per cent had no investment plans for establishing even basic clinical services in their area.

The society said that a basic service could be set up for just £50,000, less than the cost of treatment for two weeks' worth of hip fracture cases in any health district in the country. The annual cost to the NHS of treating osteoporosis and its effects is estimated at £750m at least.

However, unless health commissions provide clinicians with appropriate local guidelines to improve treatment and prevention and unless they provide the funding support and facilities they need, all this knowledge is going to waste.

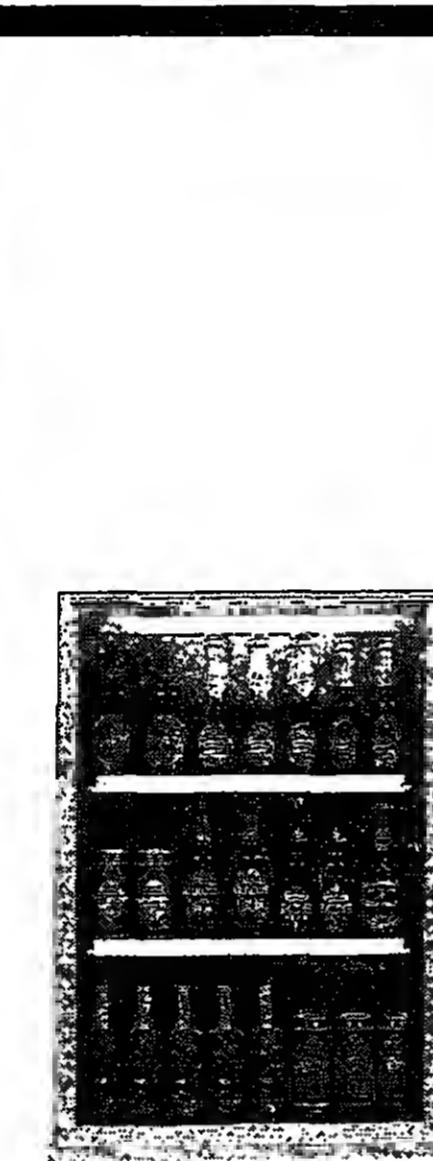
DAILY POEM

From A Part of Speech

By Joseph Brodsky

Not that I am losing my grip: I am just tired of summer. You reach for a shirt in the drawer and the day is wasted. If only winter were here for snow to smother all these streets, these humans; but first, the blasted green. I would sleep in my clothes or just pluck a borrowed book, while what's left of the year's slack rhythm, like a dog abandoning its blind owner, crosses the road at the usual zebra. Freedom is when you forget the spelling of a tyrant's name and your mouth's saliva is sweeter than Persian pie, and though your brain is wrung tight as the horn of a ram, nothing drops from your pale-blue eye.

Joseph Brodsky, who died last weekend aged 55, spent most of his life since he was exiled from Russia in 1972 in America, but particularly in the late Seventies and Eighties he was often in Britain, restless and bounding with pent-up energy. *A Part of Speech* was published by OUP in 1980 (the above taken from the last section of the title-poem) and contained his first poems in English and translations of his own Russian poems. Despite criticism levelled at these translations for turpitude, Brodsky's humanitarian concerns shine through. Auerbach's observation that Brodsky was a "traditionalist... interested in reflections upon the human condition, death, and the meaning of existence" remained true throughout his creative life.



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in the early 90s by two scientists working in Dortmund, Germany.

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Today, thanks to these efforts, virtually the entire German domestic fridge market uses greenfreeze technology.

Thanks to companies like Calor Gas, Britain is now the world leader in greenfreeze. And the technology is rapidly spreading around the world, reaching even China - potentially the world's largest refrigeration market.

For these reasons, we are especially pleased to celebrate this week's opening. Indeed, it may be just the occasion on which to raid the chiller cabinet.

If you would like to know more about how Greenpeace is challenging industry to deliver solutions, not compromises, call Freephone 0800 374 428 for an information pack.

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GREENPEACE

news

Divisions over nuclear laboratory remain as inquiry ends

STEPHEN GOODWIN

The marathon inquiry into plans to build a rock laboratory beneath west Cumbria, in the hope of proving the site safe for a nuclear waste dump, ended yesterday with the battle lines little changed.

UK Nirex, the state-owned nuclear waste company, maintains it is time to "go underground" while Friends of the Earth claim another 5 to 10 years of surface investigation

needs to be carried out before such a scheme is undertaken.

Observers at the 66-day inquiry in Cleator Moor civic hall have been impressed by the weight of scientific evidence produced on behalf of FoE and Greenpeace on the geological uncertainties of the site, but they remain unsure how that will affect the outcome.

The inquiry was ordered after Cumbria County Council turned down Nirex's plan to sink a £195m laboratory near the vil-

lage of Gosforth on the western edge of the Lake District National Park. Some £400m has already been spent on preliminary work.

Nirex concedes there are geologically safer sites in Britain "good promise" for a repository - costing a further £1.2bn - for the radioactive waste produced at British Nuclear Fuels' Sellafield reprocessing plant, just two miles away.

In the most optimistic scenario, from Nirex's point of view, the earliest date a reposi-

tory could be in operation is 2012. But each year of delay costs the company £33m in interest charges.

Nirex concedes there are geologically safer sites in Britain "good promise" for a repository - costing a further £1.2bn - for the radioactive waste produced at British Nuclear Fuels' Sellafield reprocessing plant, just two miles away.

"We would walk away if the underground research showed the site would not be suitable," Michael Folger, Nirex's chief ex-

ecutive, insisted, adding that the industry regulator had already made clear the amount of money spent could not justify a poor safety case.

Much of the argument has centred on site selection. Lionel Read QC, summing up for Nirex yesterday, repeated the company's contention that the existence of other potential sites was not material to the inquiry, but none the less went to great lengths to defend the selection process.

There are believed to be less geologically complex sites in East Anglia but the choice of anywhere outside west Cumbria would mean transporting the radioactive waste.

"The transport advantage is a real safety advantage, occurring here and now," Mr Folger told the *Independent*. "A different site would mean a bigger transport risk over the next 30 years in order to save a minimum extra risk in thousands of years' time."

Nirex spent almost £10m putting its case, fielding a team of lawyers and 18 of the total 73 witnesses. The next biggest cost - £500,000 - fell on the county council, which had to foot the bill for the inquiry as well as presenting its own case.

FoE, with seven scientific experts, spent £100,000, while the cost for local objectors was mainly in time. Dick Wright, of Gosforth Action Group, reckons that preparing their case took him away from his potter's

kiln for almost a month in total - but only cost £5 photocopying the group's submission.

Inquiry inspector Chris McDonald is expected to submit his report to the Secretary of State for the Environment, John Gummer, around the end of October, followed by a ministerial decision in Spring 1991.

Whatever Mr McDonald's recommendation, Mr Gummer could find himself facing a controversial decision in the run-up to a general election.

Solicitors plan to spend £5m on brighter image

STEPHEN WARD
Legal Correspondent

The Law Society's president Martin Mears is hoping to improve the image of solicitors with a £5m a year television advertising campaign.

If the spending is authorised, the profession will be asked to fund the commercials with a levy, of at least £100 a year from every partner in a solicitors' firm. The plan is for what is known as a "generic" campaign, which does not promote particular services such as wills or divorce, but which portrays solicitors as friendly, accessible and trustworthy.

When he was elected last year in the first contested vote for president for 40 years, Mr Mears promised to raise the public's low esteem for his members. He won on a tide of discontent with the Law Society establishment, particularly among high street solicitors who have seen their incomes fall through the recession, competition and a slump in house sales and widespread cut-price conveyancing.

Mr Mears insisted on election that solicitors would be more popular if they were better understood, and blamed the Law Society for failing to promote a positive image better. When he took office last summer he set

up a working party to find ways to improve things.

Mr Mears chairs that working party, and is anxious to press ahead with an advertising campaign, although others in the Law Society have reservations about the cost.

He recently met executives from the Riley Advertising agency in Glasgow, which ran a similar series of generic adverts from 1990 onwards.

They devised jokey television commercials encompassing a series of situations in which a solicitor might be needed, such as a burglar about to be arrested, and a slogan "It's never too soon to call a solicitor". At the start of the current soccer season a newspaper campaign put the slogan next to a picture of Eric Cantona just before he kicked a Crystal Palace fan.

The advertisements cost a similar amount per head to the planned campaign in England and Wales, and according to market research left the public seeing solicitors as much more approachable.

But the campaign was not universally popular with solicitors, particularly large firms with solely commercial clients, who could not see the benefit for them, and others who thought the seriousness of the profession was demeaned.

Accountants had similar reservations with a recent campaign slogan posing the risqué question: "Wouldn't you sleep easier with an accountant?"

Tony Girling, a member of the president's working party and chairman of the Law Society's public relations advisory board, said he was keen on an advertising campaign, but it needed the support of a majority of the profession.

It needed to run for at least three years to be worthwhile. "If you stopped it after a year, that would be £5m wasted," he said. In England and Wales, 40 per cent of solicitors work for large firms, with 11 or more partners, and they had to be persuaded to contribute to the levy. The last survey of the profession in 1991 showed an even split for and against a generic campaign.

Mr Girling said the majority of the working party thought there should be widespread research among solicitors before going ahead with any form of campaign. Many favoured the advertisement of particular services, or posters rather than television.

The last big television advertising campaign in England blamed a series of disasters on bad legal advice from "Whatisname". It won awards, but the profession hated the image.



Ups and downs of life: Steve Buckingham and Rob Prikett making final adjustments to the new wooden roller-coaster, *MegaFobia*, at Belmont Leisure Park, Pembrokeshire. It is the largest wooden roller-coaster to have been built in Europe since the 1940s

Photograph: Rob Stothard

Court win for dissident facing deportation

The Islamic dissident fighting deportation amid claims that his welfare is being sacrificed to protect huge arms deals with Saudi Arabia yesterday won the right to examine government documents relating to his case, writes Heather Mills.

A judge yesterday ordered the Home Office to disclose to Muhammad al-Masari details of

its discussions with the government of Dominica, the Caribbean island to which it is intended to deport him. Reports have linked the deportation to the promise of extra aid.

Counsel for Dr Masari successfully argued at a preliminary hearing of an appeal against deportation that the information was vital to assess whether Do-

mestic really would provide a safe haven. But Judge David Pearl, the chief special adjudicator, rejected a further application for the Home Office to supply details of any approach to other countries. He also rejected a request for an adjournment of the appeal, due to go ahead later this month.

Dr Masari's accusations of

corruption and calls for a peaceful transition to Islamic rule in Saudi Arabia have infuriated the Saudi royal family, who have threatened to withhold business contracts.

Yesterday's hearing concluded with the lodging of an application for a judicial review of the handling of the case by Michael Howard, the Home Secretary.

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As many of the 22 million users of Macintosh® systems know, the press has been reporting that these are challenging times for Apple. We would, therefore, like to communicate directly with you and to reassure you that the top priority of Apple's Board and management team is to take action to prepare Apple for its next chapter of growth and profitability.

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Looking forward, Apple is positioning itself to take advantage of information industry trends with the delivery of Copland, the code name of our next-generation operating system, and products based on the PowerPC microprocessor, the Newton® platform and Pippin™ technology – the television-based, affordable multimedia platform and Internet browser.

Apple's continued growth depends on constant and direct communication with you. So, I encourage you to watch spaces like this for important messages from Apple about our vision and future strategies.

Rest assured: Apple's mission remains as vibrant today as it was in 1976. It is one that cannot be realized in a year, a decade or even a lifetime. I believe it is one of the most enduring missions of any business in the world.

Sincerely,

Michael Spindler
President and CEO
On behalf of Apple employees worldwide

e-mail address: AppleForever@apple.com

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هذا من الأصل

Public safety: Judge refuses to send schizophrenic to Broadmoor

Disturbed killer 'too dangerous' for hospital

LOUISE JURY

A paranoid schizophrenic who killed two people in a six-day reign of terror after he was released from hospital by mistake was jailed yesterday. The judge said that the alternative – a secure hospital – would not guarantee public safety.

Following recent controversy over mentally ill patients who have killed while in the community, Judge Peter Beaumont rejected psychiatrists' pleas that Wayne Hutchinson, 21, should undergo supervised treatment at Broadmoor secure hospital in Berkshire.

Instead, he insisted that the double killer must go to prison to ensure "absolutely watertight protection" for the public.

Hutchinson was cleared of murder but convicted earlier this month of two counts of manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility. He was also found guilty of wounding three people with intent and attempted murder in what the judge called a "crescendo of violence" in Brixton, south London, 13 months ago. He believed he was a tiger – "the number one in the jungle".

Judge Beaumont said he posed a "grave danger". If he was sent to a mental hospital, he might be released within a very short time if his condition improved. But under a jail sentence, he could still receive treatment for his schizophrenia as the Home Secretary had the power to transfer him to hospital. The judge told Hutchinson, a small-time drug-dealer: "For six days after Christmas

1994, you brought terror to parts of Brixton."

At the earlier hearing, Dr Robin Lawrence, a consultant psychiatrist at the South Western Hospital in Brixton, told how Hutchinson was allowed to leave the hospital by "mistake" in November 1994.

He had been previously treated after hearing voices but failed to return from home leave. When he was brought back by police, he was in such a psychotic state that doctors begged them not to undo the handcuffs until the medication had time to work.

However, a locum doctor allowed him to leave the next day, and he had disappeared by the time the hospital realised the error, an Old Bailey court was told. His rampage of "mindless and horrifying violence" began on Boxing Day, when he tried to kill an old school friend by shooting through his bedroom window. The friend was not there.

Then he shot dead Anthony Kelman, 30, a doorman, outside a Brixton nightclub, and slashed a 17-year-old boy with a knife. On New Year's Eve, he stabbed three people in separate incidents ending with the death of Margaret Mutton, 41, in a late-night shop. Hutchinson was arrested hours later.

Psychiatrist who argued he should be sent to Broadmoor said they feared prison warders might not recognise symptoms of his illness. But Judge Beaumont said prison offered better protection to the public.

After yesterday's sentencing, families of the victims demanded to know how the doctor's blunder let Hutchinson out. Mrs Hatton's daughter, Louise, said: "We want answers. It's an absolute disgrace he was free, somebody has got to pay."

Mr Kelman's sister, Pat, said: "Someone has got to take responsibility."

A spokeswoman for the Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Commission, the purchasing body for the South Western Hospital which has promised an independent investigation, said they were finalising details of the inquiry panel. They hoped to start work soon.



Wayne Hutchinson: Danger

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Tastebuds tickled: A woman tasting a granadilla at Tesco's 'fruit extravaganza' yesterday

Photograph: Geraint Lewis

Store wars move to exotic fruit

GLENDY COOPER

Sun-dried tomatoes are passé. Kiwis are too. Eighties. The supermarkets' fight for the nation's palate has moved on, hoping to tempt us to part with our money by offering granadillas, tamarillos and pitahayas.

Tesco's claiming to be "six months ahead" of the other stores in exotic fruits and is currently cashing in by launching Valentine's Day gifts (including "Blind Dates" – McJool dates with a blindfold on and a lover's basket including prickly pears and mangoes), claiming such fruits have well-known aphrodisiac qualities.

But Sainsbury claims to have 22 lines of exotic fruit and hopes to push ahead by launching new varieties including the golden pawpaw – a sweeter pawpaw from Brazil – and in two to three months' time a "premium mango".

The fruits are currently aimed at the middle and upper classes, although the supermarkets hope that eventually the fruits will move down the socio-economic scale.

tomato-like fruit, physalis, a sweet gooseberry and pitahaya, a crunchy form of a kiwi. Their prices vary between 69p and £1.79, making them more expensive than the kiwi, which retails at about 18p per fruit.

Exotic fruit is the latest niche market which multiple retailers hope to make the success of the 1990s. Consumption of exotic fruit has grown 19 per cent in the last four years, according to the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Information Bureau. We currently eat 100,000 tonnes of it (compared with 1.4m tonnes of all fresh produce) and spend £74 per person per year.

But the most exotic fruits have only really reached in Britain in the last 18 months. Granadilla, also known as the Lover's Fruit, is a cousin of the passion fruit but with a more intense taste, although even its kindest friend would not deny that its insides look like frogspawn. Tamarillo is a large sweet

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12 international

Dole struggles as rivals smell blood

DAVID USBORNE
Derry, New Hampshire

New Hampshire's Republican primary still has almost three weeks to go, but everyone knows that for Bob Dole, whose race it is to lose, this campaign visit is critical. The reek of an impending political kill is in the air, and the front-runner has come to smother it, if he possibly can.

The source of Mr Dole's problems is the sudden ascent through the Republican field of Steve Forbes, a multi-millionaire publisher who until recently seemed only a maverick player, posing no genuine threat.

But yesterday the second New Hampshire poll in a week put Mr Forbes substantially ahead of the Senator from Kansas. The poll, conducted for the *Boston Globe* and WBZ-TV, showed the challenger would receive 31 per cent of the vote if the primary were held today, to 22 per cent for the Senate majority leader. Other polls have placed Mr Forbes a threatening second.

A loss to Mr Forbes either here on 20 February, or eight days earlier in the Iowa caucuses, may cripple Mr Dole's candidacy. Until recently he seemed certain to garner the most delegates in the primary process, ensuring his nomination as the Republican candidate to challenge Bill Clinton for the presidency in November.

With defeat in New Hampshire now a distinct possibility, the main American political commentators have gathered to scrutinise Mr Dole and divine the extent of his crisis.

What they found was that his demeanour had changed: this is a candidate trying very hard indeed. The recent carping about the "liberal" media is gone, replaced by a controlled display of serenity.

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The choreography of Mr Dole's passage on Wednesday through the populous south-east corner of the state was almost perfect. Unusually, his chief speech-writer was in tow to craft every syllable.

There was no repeat of last weekend's disaster here, when television cameras caught his aides hurriedly removing chairs from a rally, after only a smattering of supporters had showed up.

The only real glitch was the visit to a small brewery in Derry whose best-selling brand is

ing about it publicly. However, his advisers apparently have concluded that he must talk about it, and at length.

He told of the emotions and the tears of his fellow veterans and of visiting Italy, where he was wounded. "And I started to think that maybe there was one more mission, one more shot for my generation, one more opportunity to provide leadership to America, whose problems seem to get deeper and deeper every year," he said.

This, he told us, was the moment that he decided to try again for the presidency, even though he failed once before, in 1988, when he was beaten in this primary by George Bush.

It could be, though, that the voters of New Hampshire are no more ready to put their faith in Mr Dole now than they were eight years ago.

Emerging from Thompson's Market, a rural grocery store in Hudson, a picturesque village close to the Massachusetts border, Mark Murray, manager of a chemical company, confesses to being depressed about all the Republican candidates, including Mr Dole. "I just can't be impressed by him. I sort of think you can't teach an old dog new tricks," he said.

More telling is the reaction of guests at a chamber of commerce dinner later in the evening in Nashua. Mr Dole rehearses his speech once more, to a middle-of-the-road Republican audience that ought to be his for the taking. But even here it is hard to find anyone not afflicted with doubt.

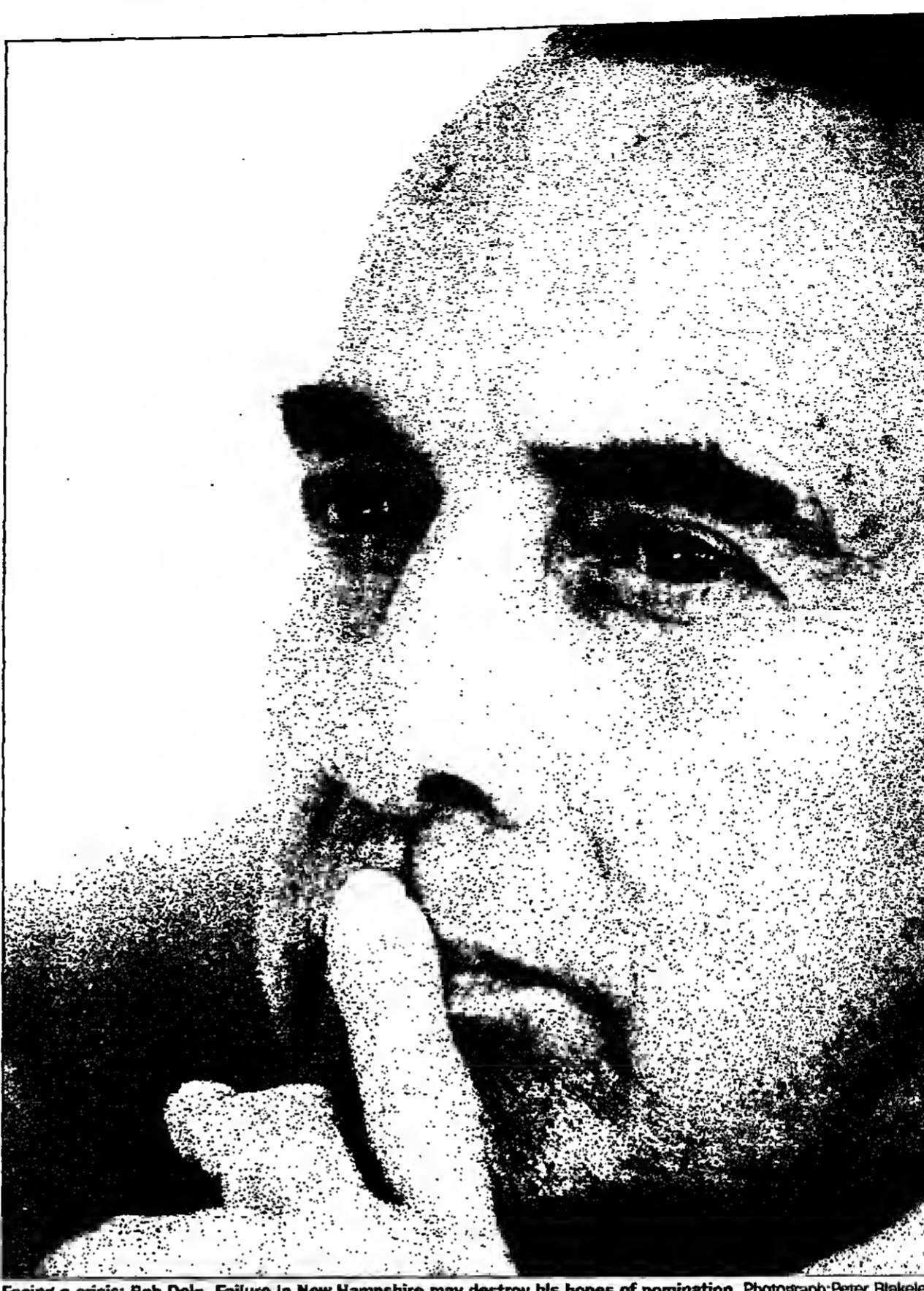
Christopher Conway, whose wife had earlier introduced the Senator to the meeting, whispers that he may vote for Mr Forbes. "I am just not convinced that Mr Dole is the right man for the job. But I'm tempted by Mr Forbes. Of all the campaign literature that arrives in the mail, there is only one kind I like to read, and it is from Forbes".

Likewise Linda Tomaselli, a Nashua lawyer. "I think that Mr Dole has had his chance already," she says. "He wasn't elected before because there is something missing."

She is about to carry on, when she abruptly bites her lip and flinches. Mr Dole is working the crowd and suddenly here he is, right before us. Quick as lightning, Ms Tomaselli smiles enthusiastically and she extends her hand.

Mr Dole was severely injured in the last days of the Second World War - his left hand is still maimed - and he is famously uncomfortable talking

News analysis, page 17



Facing a crisis: Bob Dole. Failure in New Hampshire may destroy his hopes of nomination. Photograph: Peter Blakeley

IN BRIEF

I-For ready to hit back at sniper

Washington — The commander of Nato forces in Bosnia yesterday promised swift retaliation against sniping in Sarajevo. After two Nato I-For vehicles came under fire in the Serb-held suburb of Ilidza on Wednesday night, bringing to six the number of sniping incidents there since Sunday, US Admiral Leighton Smith said: "We've got some jerk up there pulling a trigger and he's got a night scope. That makes it tough. But boy, if we do see him he had better be fast and be clad in bullet-proof stuff. Because we will attack without warning." *Reuters*

Greek shame

Athens — Greece's Socialist government and the new socialist Prime Minister, Costas Simitis, were castigated by all sides for crying "Never!", and then backing down in a row with neighbouring Turkey this week over the disputed eastern Aegean islet of Imia, known as Kardak to the Turks. "I am overcome by the sense of shame that every Greek feels," said the former conservative defence minister, Yannis Varvitsios. *Reuters*

Body search

Vienna — Experts looking for the origins of skeletons found in Upper Austria earlier this week said the dead in the mass grave certainly were not Holocaust victims. Earlier reports had suggested that the remains found on the building site of a hydro-electric project at Lambach, 140 miles west of Vienna, were Hungarian Jews. *AP*

Need for Nato

Washington — President Jacques Chirac began the first state visit by a French leader to Washington for 12 years yesterday. He told a joint meeting of Congress that the operation by US and European troops to enforce peace in Bosnia showed "the need for the [Nato] Alliance to adapt itself to a universe that is no longer that in which it was born." *Reuters*

No' to Nobel

Peking — The pro-democracy dissident Wei Jingsheng, nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by 81 members of the US Congress on Wednesday, is a convicted criminal not qualified for such an honour, China's Foreign Ministry said. Mr Wei was sentenced to 14 years in prison in December for conspiring to subvert the government. *Reuters*

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Kohl's tax cut 'trick' unites opposition

IMRE KARACS
Bon

The German government's programme to kick-start the economy met unexpectedly fierce resistance yesterday as opposition parties united in an effort to scupper planned tax cuts.

A heated debate in parliament's lower house marked the end of Helmut Kohl's brief attempt to forge a consensus in the face of soaring unemployment, and put the government on a collision course with opposition parties and the 16 regional *Länder*.

Though Helmut Kohl's coalition of Christian Democrats and Free Democrats carried the day in the Bundestag, the measures are heading for a rough ride in the upper house, controlled by the Social Democrats.

The proposed 2 per cent cut in the "solidarity surcharge" — a levy on income tax destined for the bottomless pit that is

have run a vigorous campaign against the unpopular "solidarity surcharge", eventually forcing Mr Kohl into a corner over the issue.

The circumstances in which the decision was made exploded the consensus Mr Kohl has been trying to build in recent weeks. The unions, which only a week ago struck a jobs pact with the employers and the government, are now accusing the Chancellor of fraud. And the Social Democrats, who together with the unions weekly accepted the need for pruning back the welfare state, are on the warpath.

There was no longer any sign of bipartisan harmony yesterday as Oskar Lafontaine, the leader of the SPD, laid into Mr Kohl's record, lambasting him for "losing 5 million jobs" during his 13-year reign.

The ill-feeling whipped up by what is seen as a transparent vote-buying exercise has now placed the entire economic programme in peril.

The government's package of measures, pledging to halve unemployment by the year 2000, may come unstuck in the upper chamber, the Bundesrat, which consists of representatives from the regional governments. As the SPD controls a majority of *Länder*, it also holds sway in the Bundesrat.

The government is also faulted for not coming clean on the figures. The Free Democrats and Mr Kohl's Christian Democrats still do not agree how much of the shortfall will be met by the regions, and whether the *Länder* will have to increase value-added tax to make up the deficit.

Most importantly, nobody knows whether eastern Germany will continue to receive the subsidies it has been promised. The uncertainty comes as a bitter blow to the devastated eastern economy, where growth is slowing and unemployment rising again.

The "solidarity surcharge", or "Soli" as it is called in the west, covers a large portion of the cost of rebuilding the former GDR.

Much of it goes into bricks and mortar, fuelling a construction boom that is bringing Galeries Lafayette to the unemployed proletariat of east Berlin and a post-modernist government district to the Tiergarten.

If some of the money were to stop coming, the shiny new department stores in the shadow of derelict factories might look even more ridiculous.

Threatened with extinction in three regional elections next month, the Free Democrats

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Burning ambition: Stefan Sigmund, 29, during his successful record-breaking attempt to smoke 800 cigarettes in under six minutes in Bucharest, Romania

Photograph: AP

international

Backroom fixer given task of reforming Italy

ANDREW GUMBEL
Rome

Antonio Maccanico, 71, a constitutional expert with little profile at home or abroad, was yesterday asked to form a new Italian government. The appointment came as the parties agreed to work towards institutional reform rather than rush into a general election.

Mr Maccanico, who has a history as a backroom negotiator, emerged as a compromise candidate after several other names, including his predecessor, Lamberto Dini, were rejected by the two big parliamentary blocs.

He will conduct negotiations to put together a government mixing cross-party political appointments with technocrats. If he succeeds, Italy may have a government by mid-February.

"I am sure that parliament has the moral and intellectual energy ... to open a new phase of growth, and civic and democratic progress in our country," Mr Maccanico said, after accepting the mandate of prime



Maccanico: constitutional change will be a priority

minister designate from President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro.

He outlined four main priorities: containing fiscal and monetary rectitude to bring the lira back into the European exchange rate mechanism; giving Italy an "incisive role" in its current six-month presidency of the European Union; clear rules on conflicts of interest, particularly in broadcasting, where the former prime minister Silvio

Berlusconi still wields enormous influence; reform of the constitution to reinforce the powers of the executive over parliament, increase the role of the regions and consider the direct election of a presidential figure.

The last point has been the focus of the last month of crisis, with the extreme-right leader, Gianfranco Fini, calling for a directly-elected prime minister or president, with sweeping powers.

Mr Fini yesterday expressed his satisfaction at Mr Maccanico's appointment. The centre-left had more mixed feelings, with some deputies saying they would never co-operate with the centre-right under Mr Maccanico's leadership.

Mr Maccanico is likely to keep on some members of Mr Dini's team. He himself is unlikely to make much of a splash. A southern-born lawyer, he was minister for institutional reform in the late 1980s. Under his aegis no institutional reforms were introduced.

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14 international

Unhappy comparisons: After Gorbachev, the Kremlin is well aware of the awesome power of the miners

Pit strike raises spectre for Yeltsin

PHIL REEVES
Moscow

It was just about the worst holiday present Boris Yeltsin could have wished for, and one which invited unhappy comparisons with an era when fortune was far kinder to him. As the president turned 65, an occasion which slipped by without pomp and circumstance, hundreds of thousands of Russia's coal miners went on strike.

No one better knows the power of the miners than Mr Yeltsin. Mass strikes in the pits of western Siberia, the Ukraine and elsewhere in 1989 did much to accelerate the fall of his adversary, Mikhail Gorbachev, hastening the death throes of the Communist Party, the final disintegration of the Soviet Union and his eventual ascent to the Kremlin.

Yesterday's strike swept through mines from southern Russia to the northern Urals and Siberia, many of which were once hotbeds of Yeltsin support. It was to demand back-pay which has been held up for months, better living conditions and greater state support for the beleaguered coal industry. Rosugol, the state-controlled coal monopoly, said more than 300,000 miners walked out from 118 of Russia's 182 pits, although trade union officials put the figure at around 500,000. Meanwhile more than 500,000 miners downed tools in the neighbouring Ukraine for the same principal reason; they



Wage rage: Miners from eastern Ukraine demanding back-pay demonstrating outside government offices in Kiev

claim they are owed \$370m (£247m) in unpaid wages.

It is too early to predict the impact of the strike, as some miners were determined to stay out indefinitely while others

restricted their action to refusing coal deliveries to consumers for only 48 hours. But, even if fears of widespread power cuts in the freezing midwinter prove unfounded, it is yet another

thorn in the side of Mr Yeltsin, drawing unwanted attention to the plight of millions whose pay has been held up for months, including teachers, civil servants and air traffic controllers.

Just when he is doing his best to spruce up his act before June's presidential election, Mr Yeltsin will not have warmed to the spectacle of a large crowd of miners marching through

the snowy streets of Vorkuta, in the far north, waving banners demanding the resignation of the prime minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin. "A miner can work on his knees on the coal-

face, but he cannot live on his knees and never will," said one. Nor will he have enjoyed the sight of his opponents seizing hungry on the issue; the State Duma (lower house of parliament), where the Communists hold the most seats, immediately passed a vote of solidarity with the striking miners.

The strike went ahead despite Mr Yeltsin's efforts to deflect it by promising to pay up. On Monday, he declared that the government had the money, blamed poor organisation for the delays and threatened to fire the regional bureaucrats responsible. And yesterday one of his top aides again said the miners would be paid under a new "tough monthly schedule".

But the problem appears to run deeper than that. Anatoly Yakunin, a Rosugol official, blamed the crisis on energy plants and factories that own mines more than \$400m for deliveries. Whoever is at fault, they will have taken the bloom off the bunches of flowers and trinkets that Mr Yeltsin's aides presented him yesterday during a birthday that he would probably prefer to forget.

■ Moscow (AP) — A Chechen political activist, Ruslan Sosambekov, said yesterday that prisoners in a Grozny detention camp from which he has just been released are being tortured. The camps were set up in Chechnya after Russian troops went in to crush its independence drive in December 1994.

Sartre's old paper rescued by big business

STEPHEN JESSEL
Paris

The threat of closure which was hanging over *Liberation*, one of France's few national daily newspapers, has been lifted after the staff agreed to a financial rescue package, but the deal has robbed the paper's journalists of much of their prized independence.

Almost 80 per cent of the staff voted in favour of a 70m-franc (£9m) recapitalisation plan raising the share of capital held by the Chargers group, which has extensive interests in film and television, from 12 per cent to 65 per cent, and reducing the staff share from 45 per cent to 20 per cent.

The vote appears to reflect a gloomy recognition that the choice lay between accepting the plan and seeing the paper close.

In a separate vote, 65 per cent endorsed an "independence pact" which promises the staff a continued blocking minority on the paper's board and the right to elect their own editor, subject to certain conditions.

In alliance with another group of shareholders they will have the right of veto on some major strategic issues.

There's relief rather than euphoria," said one senior journalist. "No one is happy about selling the paper, but it's better we do business with a company that has had a stake in the paper. And at least the vote was clear, and not a 51-49 split."

The paper, tabloid in form but serious in approach, and usually abbreviated to *Lib*, was founded in 1973 by the late Jean-Paul Sartre, among others, to recreate the spirit of the 1968 street revolt by students and workers.

Liberation ceased publication in early 1981, but reappeared in a less stridently left-wing guise some months later, although its critics suggest that some of its staff are still living in 1968.

Its circulation reached 195,000 in 1989, but has been falling in recent years.

Even so, compared with some of its competitors, the paper has a thoughtful and questioning approach and a degree of imagination. Its foreign coverage is good, it reads well to big news stories and its sometimes eclectic cultural section shows verve.

The death at the end of 1995 of the lively and cheap *Info-Main* was a sign of a wider crisis facing the national press in France, as the result of a flourishing network of regional papers, an archaic distribution system and high cover prices (usually Fr7, or 90p).

Liberation had two relaunches in the past three years, including an unsuccessful attempt at a weekend supplement and an over-ambitious expansion to 80 pages, but was estimated to be losing £1.5m a year. Staff rejected an earlier rescue attempt which would have entailed a 25 per cent cut in jobs, but the rescue deal will still entail the loss of 78 jobs at the paper by the end of November.

A new life across the Atlantic

Freed from prison in France, F. Jacques is now a Medecin sans frontières. Medecin, the iron-fisted Mayor of Nice for 25 years, is starting life again in Uruguay, to which he fled in 1990. He was released two weeks ago and now lives in a luxury home near the Atlantic coastal resort of Punta del Este.

"Now, all I want is peace — and to be loved," said Medecin, 67, who was convicted of embezzling nearly £2m from the Nice Opera and accepting £520,000 in bribes. "It was really tough," he told Associated Press news agency, referring to



Jacques Medecin: Turned his back on France

his time in prison. "If you're guilty, a two-year sentence is nothing, but when you're innocent it's difficult to stand."

• He wants to become a citizen

of Uruguay, "where the people are marvellous" — unlike in France, where he says he was treated as a "war criminal". The right-wing ex-mayor contends he was the victim of a political witch hunt instigated by François Mitterrand. "I've said goodbye to politics," Medecin said. "I don't want anything to do with it. And I'm not seeking revenge."

Thirty-eight Buddhist monks at the Tharlam Monastery near Kathmandu have a new American "boss": Sonam Wangdu is from Seattle, Washington, and is only four years old.

Tibetan Buddhists recognise the boy as Deshung Rinpoche IV, the reincarnation of a Tibetan high lama who died in Seattle in 1987. The youngster is now known as Trulku-la, the Tibetan term for reincarnation.

His mother, Carolyn Lama, is an American Buddhist; his father, a Tibetan, died two years ago.

Trulku-la, who was enthroned in Nepal aged two, returned to the Himalayas on Sunday with his mother — plus a collection of action figures and some Disney videos — to begin a rigorous education.

Ms Lama eventually will go back home to Seattle, and the monks will be responsible for the boy's care. She says she'll miss him but won't worry: "He ordained most of them in his last life, and they love him. They've been waiting and waiting for him to come back."

Russia's No 1 hell-raiser, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, is targeting his country's youth in his presidential campaign. His misnamed Liberal Democratic Party is sponsoring a 120-con-

cert tour by the hard-rock band Hell Raisers. "I like youths jumping on the stage in their torn jeans taking off their jackets and embracing each other," the flamboyant nationalist revealed as the leather-clad band members looked on quietly.

Mr Zhirinovsky's main rivals for the Russian headband, the Communists, have denounced rock music as a Western plot to corrupt young minds. But Mr Zhirinovsky sees it differently: "Their songs are patriotic," he declared.

The pro-government Our Home Is Russia party seems to agree. During the parliamentary election campaign last autumn, the party brought in Western acts — including the rapper MC Hammer — in an effort to attract young voters.

Maryann Bird

Aborigines track Ned Kelly reward

Brisbane (Reuters) — Descendants of Aboriginal trackers who helped to catch the Australian outlaw Ned Kelly in 1880 have gone to court to seek payment for his capture.

Saying their grandfathers were left to die in poverty, they lodged a writ in Brisbane Supreme Court yesterday.

"These trackers from Fraser Island [in Queensland], were used by the Victorian government to track down Ned Kelly in 1880, and were promised £50 each," a spokesman for Queensland's attorney-general said.

"But the descendants now claim the trackers were never paid, and are suing the Victorian

government for non-payment and the Queensland government for not pursuing their salaries."

Descendants of two of the trackers want a share of the £8,000 reward paid for the capture of Kelly — plus 116 years' interest. The Fraser Island Aboriginal Land Council claims this could amount to £540m (£20m) for each tracker.

A spokeswoman for Victoria's attorney-general said a writ seeking damages from the Victorian government was first lodged in late 1994. But the government threw out the claim, saying the trackers' wages had been paid.

Even so, compared with some of its competitors, the paper has a thoughtful and questioning approach and a degree of imagination. Its foreign coverage is good, it reads well to big news stories and its sometimes eclectic cultural section shows verve.

The death at the end of 1995 of the lively and cheap *Info-Main* was a sign of a wider crisis facing the national press in France, as the result of a flourishing network of regional papers, an archaic distribution system and high cover prices (usually Fr7, or 90p).

Tired Basques take a stand against separatist violence

ELIZABETH NASH
San Sebastian

The two camps faced each other in front of San Sebastian cathedral, separated by riot police whose identities were concealed behind balaclava-like masks. Each side, several hundred strong, stood silently behind its banners: one in support of hostages held by the Basque separatist group, Eta, the other demanding freedom for imprisoned Eta members.

When the cathedral clock struck the quarter hour, the hostage supporters burst into applause, the counter-demonstrators into catcalls, whistles

and insults. The stand-off takes place in San Sebastian several evenings a week, and reveals two things about the battle for Basque separatism, which in 27 years has claimed some 800 lives, including six in a huge bomb attack last December in Madrid.

First, despite the fear that

grips many Basques, more and more of them are joining peaceful demonstrations against Eta violence. Last weekend 30,000 took to the streets in Bilbao; another 20,000 marched in nearby Logrono on Wednesday.

Secondly, despite calls for dialogue across the Basque political spectrum, Eta is taking an increasingly hard line.

Among the peace demonstrators in the cathedral square was Joseba Egibar, spokesman for the region's largest political force, the conservative Basque Nationalist Movement (PNV). "There's deadlock. People are tired up. They want the politicians to find solutions and we can't," he says. "Neither Eta nor [the pro-Eta party] Herri Batasuna has a Gerry Adams, and we can't invent one."

Eta yesterday claimed re-

sponsibility for kidnapping a prison officer, Jose Antonio Ortega Lara, who disappeared two weeks ago. They still hold Jose Maria Aldaya, owner of a San Sebastian transport company, who was seized eight months ago, probably because he jibbed at paying protection money, or "revolutionary tax".

The organisation wants Madrid to bring nearer home 540 Eta prisoners who are dispersed in jails throughout Spain, and to declare them political prisoners. In the cathedral crypt, 15 relatives of Eta prisoners are on hunger strike. Among them is Ana Gil, 29, whose brother has served eight years of a 42-year sentence for being an Eta member. He is in Seville, at the other end of the country — or, in Ana's eyes, in another country.

"I try to visit him every fortnight, but it takes time and money. The prisoners are isolated, and the authorities pressure them to renounce the struggle. They have the constitutional right to be in prison near home," she says.

Recently a more intransigent Eta and Herri Batasuna leadership has emerged, supplementing bomb attacks and kidnappings with street violence. As one local commentator puts it: "In all the splits they have suffered, the winner is the one that puts the pistol on the table."

As HB is gradually losing

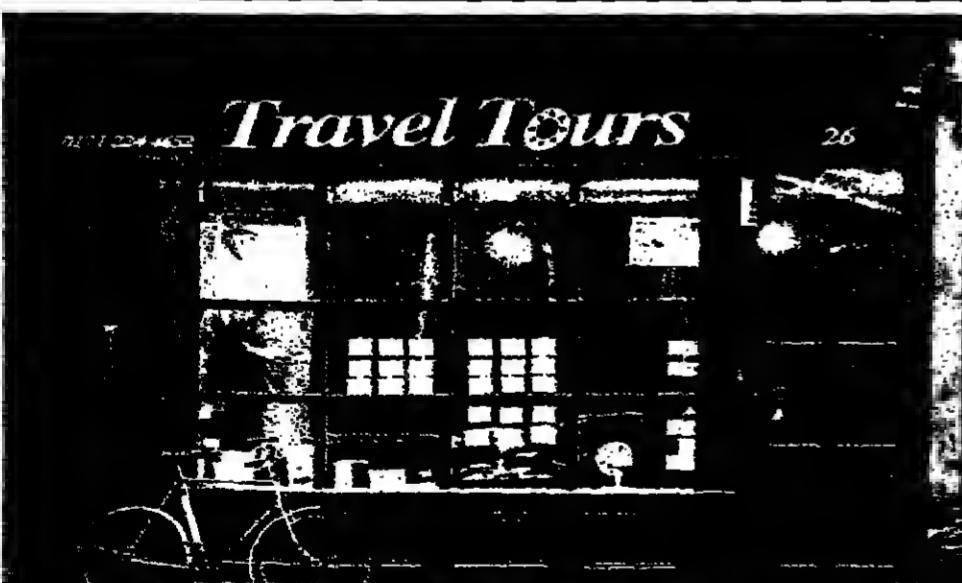
voters — it usually wins 15 per cent in the region — its radical youth wing, Jarrai, has taken to the streets, harrying peace protests and winning recruits among marginalised youngsters, of whom half in the Basque country are unemployed.

Joseba Alvarez, the son of an Eta founder, is a San Sebastian councillor and on the executive of HB. "We Basques are denied our historic right to independence. We told Madrid in April that if they recognised our right to self-determination and our territorial integrity, Eta would lay down their arms," he said.

"The democratic means of liberating our country do not exist, so we have no alternative but to choose our own path, and there will always be a section of people who choose the armed road." Even if this is represents a minority? "The rights of peoples aren't measured in terms of minority and majority. We are fighting for a free country."

While HB is separate from Eta, the organisations "share the same ideals and strategy", Mr Alvarez says.

Despite this uncompromising stance, Mr Egibar of the PNV speaks for many when he says: "We have to talk. That doesn't mean dropping our trousers for Eta. Peace is more than a desire, it's a necessity, because our society is becoming more and more divided."



If you don't listen to your customer

كما من الأصل

Sartre's old paper rescued by big business

STEPHEN JESSEL
Paris

The threat of closure which hangs over *Le Monde*, one of France's last national newspapers, has been lifted after the staff agreed to a long readership purchase deal that has saved the paper's 100 journalists of much of their print independence.

Almost 90 per cent of the staff voted to back a 12-month plan to recognise the paper's right to buy the share of capital held by the Charbonneau group, which has extensive interests in film and television from 12 per cent of press and reducing the staff share from 45 per cent to 25 per cent.

The 12 per cent to buy a 25 per cent recognition that the choice lies between accepting the plan and leaving the paper.

In a separate vote of 90 per cent endorsed an independent plan which gives staff a 25 per cent holding in the paper based on the right to buy the share of capital held by the Charbonneau group.

The paper's 100 journalists have been given a 25 per cent

'Terror' drives US diplomats from Mid-East

BERT FISK

Washington's decision on Tuesday to withdraw its embassy staff from Khartoum — from being just a response to another "terrorist" threat — presents another fundamental shrinkage of America's presence in the Middle East. Its departure from the Sudan, at a time when the world is being appealed to applaud Washington's reported success in an Arab-Israeli peace, means that not a single American diplomat remains more than half the land mass of the Middle East.

For the US now has no embassies in Afghanistan, Iran, Libya and — in a few days' time — in the few days' time. Sudan's diplomats live in local fortresses in Algiers, Istanbul and Cairo. US citizens are still banned from travelling to Lebanon and are advised to special security precautions. Egypt, the West Bank, Gaza — to the last 24 hours, in Saudi Arabia as well. The shrinkage will inevitably mean that US intelligence — never very impressive in the Middle East — will be even more ineffective.

The United States ahaned Iran after its diplomats were taken hostage by followers of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, and closed its compound in Baghdad after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait 10 years later. The departure of 30 US diplomats from Khartoum — responsible for Saudi Arabia's war against Islamist militants who claim the kingdom is corrupt — were killed in a car bomb explosion in Riyadh last November. Washington's isolation with-

flown out of Khartoum after an embassy communications officer was shot and seriously wounded in the city; in 1993, more diplomats' families received State Department orders to leave after Washington put Sudan on a list of countries that "sponsor terrorism".

The latest evacuation follows the UN Security Council's demand that Sudan hand over three men who it claimed were responsible for the attempted assassination of President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in Ethiopia last June. The men — all believed to be Egyptian — tried to kill the leader of America's most important Arab ally when he arrived in a motorcade to attend the Organisation of African Unity conference in Addis Ababa.

American diplomats from Khartoum will be relocated, according to the State Department, in a "neighboring country" — probably Egypt, although Nairobi has been used as a bolt-hole in the past — to "maintain contact" with Sudan. No such evacuation, however, can be contemplated from Riyadh, where US sources claimed on Wednesday that they had received "new and disturbing reports that... American interests will be targeted by terrorists". US citizens were advised to watch out for letter bombs. Five American military advisers to the Saudi National Guard — responsible for Saudi Arabia's war against Islamist militants who claim the kingdom is corrupt — were killed in a car bomb explosion in Riyadh last November.

Washington's isolation with-

Monster emerges from the deep



It is one of the world's most elusive creatures. Scientists trawling 1,400ft (400m) under the ocean have netted this giant squid — 26ft (8m) long and weighing nearly a ton. A research ship caught the creature near the Chatham Islands, 600 miles east of New Zealand. Steve O'Shea, a marine scientist at New Zealand's National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research, said that the female squid is one of only 20 of this size known to have been caught during the past decade. Its tentacles stretch 13ft, and its head is nearly 6ft long. Scientists kept it in the ship's cold storage until the vessel returned to Wellington this week. Photograph: AP

Venice blaze fires tenors with the love of applause

ANDREW GUMBLE



Domingo: will sing to save opera, but not with rivals

The smoke has barely cleared from the ruins of La Fenice, the Venice opera house which burned down this week, and already the world's most famous tenors are competing for the right to become the "saviour" whose charity efforts will rebuild the theatre in double-quick time.

Luciano Pavarotti did not waste a moment in putting his name forward, announcing to the world's media while the flames were still raging on Monday night that he would stage a concert in St Mark's basilica — singing alone, as he took great pains to emphasise.

His great rival, Plácido Domingo, was not to be outdone, however.

Yesterday he announced from Buenos Aires that he would take the lead role in a production of Verdi's *Otello*, which is partly set in Venice, right outside the basilica in St Mark's Square.

Again, he showed no interest

in teaming up with any other big names. "If every artist sings on his own, he can raise more money that way," he said.

Both announcements seemed suspiciously hasty, since it was clear the two tenors had not had the time to consult or seek permission for their respective plans.

Instead, one detected a dis-

tant whiff of the deep rivalry that has riven the two men since they shot to popular international fame as the voices behind the World Cup in Italy five-and-a-half years ago.

Together with José Carreras, Pavarotti and Domingo made up the "Three Tenors", whose concerts before the 1990 and 1994 World Cup finals were huge successes and sold millions of records. Since then, Pavarotti in particular has tapped the popular market, linking up with the likes of U2 and Sting. On Monday night he was in Turin in preparation for a centenary performance of Puccini's *La Bohème*.

The truth is, though, that both Pavarotti and Domingo are reaching the end of their operatic careers. The operatic world has a time-honoured tradition of cashing in on the commercial market before slipping into retirement. They may indeed be genuinely sorry about the destruction of La Fenice, but it also presents them with the perfect opportunity for publicity.

international

Syria peace hope tempts Peres to polls

MICHAEL SHERIDAN
Diplomatic Editor

Israel's Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, yesterday gave a clear indication that he may call an early general election to win a new mandate for his Labour government and spur on peace talks with Syria.

Israeli officials close to the Prime Minister said they believed the balance of probability now favoured an election before the scheduled date of 29 October. There have been fierce arguments inside the government over the best tactical timing for the polls. Labour has held a commanding lead over the opposition Likud party since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin on 4 November last year, but the gap may be narrowing.

Mr Peres, speaking on a visit to London, said he believed there were political and economic factors that pointed towards the desirability of an early election. "I feel we have to have a renewed mandate," he said. "Usually I would like to see the election take place on time, but there are some considerations... that might make for an early election."

The Israeli leader said he would make his calculations on the basis of his policies, not his daily performance in the opinion polls. "I think popularity is like a weather forecast," he said. "It's good for the day it happens, but you don't collect weather forecasts to make a biography."

Mr Peres revealed that the latest round of talks between Israel and Syria in the US had "gained a character of total informality", and included wide-ranging discussions on economic co-operation, the

normalisation of relations and water issues.

The Israeli leader's assessment conflicted with that in yesterday's edition of the Syrian official newspaper, *Al Thawra*, which accused Israel of making "impossible and provocative demands regarding the security arrangements". The talks wound up on Wednesday at the secluded Wye Plantation, near Washington, without any breakthrough that might help Mr Peres with the voters.

None the less, Mr Peres insisted yesterday that "it is only a matter of time before we have peace with Syria" and said he expected progress during the next visit to the Middle East by the US Secretary of State, Warren Christopher.

The two foes remain divided over the extent of an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Golan Heights and the nature of the security regime accompanying a settlement. Syria says the military arrangements ought to be "balanced and equal", but there is disagreement about the symmetry of troop deployment. Israel is worried about its narrow band of territory in Galilee, and Syria about the short distance between the front line and its capital.

Mr Peres was travelling to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, after meeting John Major, Malcolm Rifkind, the Foreign Secretary, and senior members of the Shadow Cabinet in London. He described relations between Britain and Israel as "exceedingly friendly" and said, without elaborating, that relations between the British and Israeli defence establishments were growing. British sources described the talks as warm and co-operative.

Colombo vows to hit back at Tigers

ROHAN GUNASEKERA
Reuters

He yesterday morning. They said rescue workers expected to find at least a dozen more.

The toll could rise further, with at least 100 critically injured in hospital. The acting national police chief, Mithra Ariyasinghe, said nearly 1,300 people had been hurt and more than 900 were still in hospital. The 440lb (200kg) truck bomb was aimed at the central bank in what officials said was an attack on the Sri Lankan economy.

Crucial Investigation Department officials said two men, captured along with rifles, bomb-making kits and radio transmitters, had identified themselves only as Ragunathan and Kuttu. They were said to have identified the suicide bomber as Raj. Security forces were still searching for other hit-squad members who had arrived from the north on 8 January, Mr Ariyasinghe said.

The government had been expecting an attack in Colombo ever since security forces seized the Tiger stronghold of Jaffna in December, the biggest setback for the rebels in their 13-year war for independence in the north and east.

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obituaries/gazette

Barbara Skelton

Some women are different things to many men but Barbara Skelton seemed to be the same with them all. At first sight she was *kittenish*, amusingly troublesome, irresistibly attractive. Only later did it emerge what a challenging woman she was: selfish, sulky, socially unmanageable, agreeable only when she was in the mood – the victim of the incurable boredom which fostered her promiscuity and her notorious rudeness. She was perhaps the most celebrated *femme fatale* of that generation which took its first pleasures between air raid and all-clear, and her early admirers included Peter Quennell, Feleks Topolski and Oshert Lancaster.

Indeed, although she cited

Erich von Stroheim as representing her physical ideal, and although she extended her affections to a king and a policeman, reflecting the while that "sex is a great leveller", Skelton was greatest tormenting writers and artists. Alan Ross, editor of the *London Magazine*, Bob Silvers, founder of the *New York Review of Books*, the journalist John Raymond, the cinephile John Sutro and the painter Michael Wishart, were all at one stage enraged. Kenneth Tynan told her, "Sex means snack and beautiful means bottom and always will"; and there was even a lesbian encounter one bored Paris afternoon, but "I just saw her as another man with breasts."

Yet, whatever their tastes and accomplishments, these suitors had to take her as they found her. She declined to accommodate, and scorned well-heeled dissimulation; her rudeness was a function of her honesty and it was this restless candour that imparted vitality and persuasiveness to her other career as a novelist and autobiographer.

Although she numbered Richard Brinsley Sheridan among her antecedents, her immediate family was undistinguished. Her great-aunt Gerda sur-

vived the wreckage of the *Titanic* and, singing hymns as she was rowed to safety, was later commended for bravery. Her father was an army officer with an interest in cricket and actresses and her mother a gaiety girl who boasted eyes the hue of blue hydrangeas.

They met while she was appearing in *The Merry Widow* and Barbara was born in 1916. Family finances suffered with the Wall Street crash and the Skeltons moved around Kent and Berkshire before settling in London and producing another daughter, Brenda.

Barbara was a passionately recalcitrant child who ran at her mother with a carving knife, and following her expulsion from a convent school she enrolled early, and like some fictional adventures, in the academy of life. She modelled in a dress shop, began an affair with a wealthy friend of her father's and had her first abortion. She was subsequently in India, where her relations with an officer led to his court martial.

Back in London she turned her beautiful shape to profit by modelling for Schiaparelli, and with the outbreak of war worked as a truck-driver and secretary. However, wartime drudgery was not for her and Donald Maclean sponsored her application to the cipher department of the Foreign Office. Posted to the embassy in Cairo, she beguiled King Farouk, told her approvingly that she was "a real mix" and flogged her outside the palace with the cord of his dressing-gown. She said, "I would have preferred a splayed cane." In the later stages of the war, and once again in London, she lived with Peter Quennell, who christened her "Baby" and introduced her to their neighbour, Cyril Connolly, founder and editor of *Horizon*.

Connolly offered a compound of qualities as unusual as it proved attractive. He was curiously unappealing, yet a great literary stylist, a one-man

show of artistic vanities and unpatriotic aestheticism, a baby-tireless in his manipulation of female admirers; and he became the love of her life. They were married in 1950 and spent five turbulent years in "Oak Coffin", the cottage she bought for £400 in Kent. The scenes were terrible, yet none of their friends could confidently deny that the Connollys' harsh words did not conceal, or even pervertly express, a strong bond of feeling.

With preparation for her first novel, *A Young Girl's Touch* (1956), she became involved with the publisher George Weidenfeld, whose hirsute body she later described to the world and whom she treated somewhat harshly. "There was hardly any pleasure in his company except for the instinctive animal desire to be with one's mate." When the Connollys divorced, Weidenfeld was cited as co-respondent and soon

afterwards became Barbara's second husband, only again to seek divorce, with Connolly this time cited as the co-respondent.

This amorous carousel was the talk of the drawing-rooms of higher Bohemia, but Barbara's third marriage to the physicist Derek Jackson, millionaire son of the founder of the *News of the World*, went largely unremarked, despite her admission that it was "not for love that I married Professor Jackson". That union also foundered but alimony brought security and some measure of stability, and apart from an interval in New York, Barbara divided most of the remainder of her life between properties in Paris and Provence.

Unable to have children, she adopted instead a menagerie of exotic pets and abandoned fiction in favour of memoirs. *Tears Before Bedtime* (1987) and *Wipe No More* (1989) constitute an

engaging literary achievement, not so much as chronicles of their time, but as comic and cruel self-portraits recounted in a random, devil-may-care tone appropriate to their insouciant heroine and her adventures. If she is unsparing of the famous friends and enemies she made, she is no more romantic about herself. And although her books are almost depressing, they are also very funny. Had she done nothing but render Cyril Connolly as a great comic archetype she would still deserve literary recognition.

In 1993, to some consternation, she returned to London and lived in a flat above the King's Road with two Siamese cats. I interviewed her for a book I was then writing and found her a strangely disturbing hostess who complained incessantly about money and resented London, whither she had returned to be near her friends, "although you may

think I don't have many left here, either". There seemed to be a complicity between herself and her predatory pets, and, like familiars, they shared their mistress's eyes, which were not only the most beautiful I have ever seen, huge, lavender-hued and lozenge-shaped, but also seemed to be so penetrating as to reduce everything in their range to transubstantiation.

Her figure remained shapely, her bearing agile; decay, when it came, was sudden, with a brain tumour, and in her last days she was nursed by Cyril Connolly's daughter, Cressida.

Clive Fisher

Barbara Skelton, writer; born Maldenhead 26 June 1916; married 1950 Cyril Connolly (marriage dissolved 1956); 1956 George Weidenfeld (marriage dissolved 1961); 1966 Derek Jackson (marriage dissolved); died Pershore, Worcestershire 27 January 1996.

He became Deputy Prime Minister in 1971 and added the

U San Yu

U San Yu was President of Burma from 1981 until 1988. His career as a soldier and then as a politician under the military-socialist system depended throughout on the patronage of General Ne Win, the ruler of Burma from 1962 onwards, when Ne Win seized power in a military coup.

San Yu's unquestioning loyalty to Ne Win was regarded as the main reason for his rapid rise to the top in the army, and then in the one-party system which Ne Win put in place to run the country for more than a quarter of a century. He was the only one of Ne Win's close associates who over the years did not get sacked, imprisoned or exiled as an ambassador for doing dangerously well in the old man's eyes.

San Yu was born in 1919 near Prome, the district where Ne Win was also born. Educated at Rangoon University before the Second World War, when its standards were high, and, according to one source, briefly at an American military college, San Yu was commissioned in the Burma Independence Army in 1942 and fought with it first alongside the Japanese and then, when the tide turned, briefly alongside the Allies. He was Military Secretary to Ne Win from 1956 to 1959, and then went to be military commander of the North and North West military areas, where a variety of insurgents – Nagas, Kachins and assorted Communist groups – were active.

The secrecy which surrounded the character and private lives of Burma's senior military élite was more than usually marked in the case of U San Yu, partly because he never fell seriously out of General Ne Win's favour. But such evidence as emerged suggested that he was efficient, colourless and more modest than most of his peers. No one had any illusion that as President he exercised supreme power, which remained in Ne Win's hands even after he relinquished that office. In September 1987, for example, when all currency notes above the value of one pound were rendered valueless on the stroke of 11 one morning, no one had any doubt who was responsible, and San Yu's own family was rumoured to have lost a fortune.

As President, San Yu had some formal contact with foreigners, and appeared benign and alert when greeting arriving and departing ambassadors and official guests. When the Princess Royal visited Burma in 1987, he warmly congratulated her on her work for children world-wide, with every impression of sincerity, even while Burma refused to allow the Save the Children Fund or any other charity to operate in the country.

Martin Morland

U San Yu, army officer and politician; born Prome, Burma 1919; President of Burma 1981-88; married (four children); died Rangoon 28 January 1996.



Skelton with Cyril Connolly, the love of her life. He is the comic hero of her autobiography *Tears Before Bedtime* (1987).

Wing Cdr Roderick Learoyd VC

Wing Commander Roderick "Babe" Learoyd was awarded the Victoria Cross for his conduct during a bombing raid over Germany on 12 August 1940.

As one of a series of operations, Acting Flight Lieutenant Learoyd was ordered to lead a formation of Hampden twin-engine bombers (six from his own squadron, No 49) into Germany. The aircraft were slow, unsophisticated, and poorly defended. Their target was the aqueduct carrying the Dortmund-Ems canal.

This was known to be a target of special importance in view of the essential build-up of barges and other shipping for industrial and military support and particularly for the shipping planned for the Channel ports invasion. In view of this the Germans had provided overwhelming anti-aircraft defences in the form of hundreds of guns of all calibres and massed searchlights designed to blind the crews.

The latter had to fly at bombing levels down to 150ft to ensure the necessary accuracy

and from a predictable direction obvious to the enemy. Learoyd and his crews were well aware of what they were asked to face, having attacked the canal before. Indeed to fly with bomber command made such experiences familiar to all.

After starting his bombing run Learoyd's aircraft was literally shot to pieces, losing among other things its undercarriage controls and his landing flaps. He later paid tribute to the immense skill and courage of his three-man crew. It is certainly worth noting that one of his gunners was neither an officer nor an NCO but a regular airman, which was quite common in those days in bombers, in Lysanders and in Defiant fighters. These men were paid one shilling and sixpence per day.

After being educated at Wellington, he poled about for a few years before taking a short service commission in the Royal Air Force and being posted to bomber command. Operational with Bomber Command, he soon established a reputation for professional expertise and outstanding determination in locating and attacking heavily

hours of darkness still to come. He decided that a night landing would be too dangerous for his crippled aircraft and he orbited till daylight, when he made a perfect belly-landing and without undercarriage or flaps and without injury to anyone.

It has sometimes given cause for comment that such experiences did not see the end of war flying for RAF pilots. Anything but Learoyd continued to fly operationally with bomber command, eventually commanding No 44 squadron, which was the first unit to be equipped with the famous four-engine Lancaster bomber.

Like many of those who won the VC, he did not appear to be a particularly likely candidate for such supreme honour. After being educated at Wellington, he poled about for a few years before taking a short service commission in the Royal Air Force and being posted to bomber command. Operational with Bomber Command, he soon established a reputation for professional expertise and outstanding determination in locating and attacking heavily

defended targets. But he was an ordinary notables and remained a quiet and reserved man but also a friendly and comradely one. A good man at a party, but never allowing social life to interrupt his fighting career. Even after the award of the VC he gave no hint of conceit or self-importance.

After surviving the war Learoyd retired to civilian life, first as a VIP pilot and later as an export sales manager in the motor industry.

Christopher Foxley-Norris

Roderick Alastair Brook Learoyd, air force officer; born Folkestone 5 February 1913; VC 1940; died 24 January 1996.

Photograph: Imperial War Museum

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Roderick Alastair Brook Learoyd, air force officer; born Folkestone 5 February 1913; VC 1940; died 24 January 1996.

Photograph: Imperial War Museum

hours of darkness still to come. He decided that a night landing would be too dangerous for his crippled aircraft and he orbited till daylight, when he made a perfect belly-landing and without undercarriage or flaps and without injury to anyone.

It has sometimes given cause for comment that such experiences did not see the end of war flying for RAF pilots. Anything but Learoyd continued to fly operationally with bomber command, eventually commanding No 44 squadron, which was the first unit to be equipped with the famous four-engine Lancaster bomber.

Like many of those who won the VC, he did not appear to be a particularly likely candidate for such supreme honour. After being educated at Wellington, he poled about for a few years before taking a short service commission in the Royal Air Force and being posted to bomber command. Operational with Bomber Command, he soon established a reputation for professional expertise and outstanding determination in locating and attacking heavily

defended targets. But he was an ordinary notables and remained a quiet and reserved man but also a friendly and comradely one. A good man at a party, but never allowing social life to interrupt his fighting career. Even after the award of the VC he gave no hint of conceit or self-importance.

After surviving the war Learoyd retired to civilian life, first as a VIP pilot and later as an export sales manager in the motor industry.

Christopher Foxley-Norris

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Why graduates should pay more

For a bunch of academics, the university vice-chancellors are becoming rather good at politics. They meet today in London to discuss their proposal to make every university student pay a £300 registration fee. Oxford and Cambridge are considering even higher charges. They have provoked exactly the reaction they wanted – suddenly everyone is talking about a university cash crisis.

The vice-chancellors have a point. It is a great achievement that the number of graduates from higher education has risen from 98,600 in 1985 to 227,000 last year. At the same time, the funds available per student have fallen by 28 per cent, and last year capital expenditure was cut back by 47 per cent. Meanwhile, efforts to maintain quality are soaking up thousands of teaching hours.

Academics are not known for their high productivity. Yet in the past few years there have been impressive improvements in efficiency in higher education. Further productivity gains will be more difficult to generate without endangering quality. So the vice-chancellors realise that they have to find fresh funds. The question is: from whom?

Graduates should contribute to the cost of their education. Most of them earn considerably more than their degree-free contemporaries thanks in part to the £12,000 to £15,000 each in tuition fees invested in their education by the taxpayers. Part of that investment benefits society as a whole, but a fair share goes to the students. They should pay some of it back.

The trick is finding a fair way for students to pay while maintaining open and equal access to university. The vice-chancellor's proposed registration fee is not

the right answer. Parents would end up having to fork out, placing children from poorer families at a disadvantage.

A loan scheme could partly solve the problem. Students can borrow on favourable terms and defer the repayment until they are earning. The existing Student Loans Company could be extended so that students can borrow to cover their fees as well as their living costs. Another option would be to follow the Australian model and collect the repayments through the tax system.

Yet all loan-based systems have a flaw. Do we really want our 18-year-olds to start adult life with a daunting debt, the size of which might put them off higher education altogether? Fixed limits on loans are not fair: some people get far bigger financial rewards from their education than others. An Oxbridge education is more likely to smooth your way into a highly paid job than a stint at the University of Luton. A loans system does not reflect these differing returns to educational investment: graduates of Oxford and Luton would pay back the same sum.

The fairest way to reflect these differences would be through a graduate tax, for instance, an extra 1 per cent on income tax for all graduates earning more than £15,000 for the first 10 years after graduation. Those who used their education to earn more would pay more back to the taxpayers who funded it. The vice-chancellors are wrong to propose a registration fee. The Government is wrong to deny that funding of higher education does not need radical overhaul. It should get its head out of the sand and start just such a review to create a new graduate tax-based funding system.

Bringing the lottery bigwigs to book

For more than a year, most of us who've played the National Lottery have lost a small stack of money. We are transfixed by the prospect of winning but fairly bored by how the money we lose is being spent.

Every so often another list of lottery grants is announced. Their decisions are frequently greeted with bemusement. Does anyone understand why it was a top priority to further enrich the Churchill family with £12.5m for St Winston's papers?

The Government has designed the lottery as a way of raising money for a variety of causes. Yet it has not established a proper machinery to make sure the money is spent in a way that people support. Taxation and government spending is at least scrutinised by the House of Commons. But the vast sums generated by the lottery slush through unknown agencies, staffed by anonymous people, who seem to be barely accountable to anyone.

How many people, for example, know that David Steff, director of Marks and Spencer, is chairman of the body that distributes lottery cash to groups fighting poverty? Has he ever had to put forward a manifesto, outlining his priorities and asking for public approval?

It is not unusual that an élite should be charged with writing huge cheques to dole out millions of pounds of other people's money. Governments do it all the time.

The extraordinary aspect of the lottery is that those in charge of distributing its funds are subject to minimal public scrutiny. During the lottery's first year,

the lottery boards were asked to dispense £1.2b to sports, arts, heritage sites, the millennium celebrations and charities. That would be enough to fund a considerable tax cut.

Now at last, those in authority are to take a look at the books of cheque stubs that have been accumulating at the five boards that spend this good cause's cash. As reported in the *Independent* yesterday, the National Audit Office, the public finance watchdog, is planning to examine how the money has been spent.

All very well but it would have been better had these issues been debated more openly in advance. And the NAO is not rushing into the investigation. Its report will not be ready until next year. It will tackle the difficult questions about who spends the cash only after dealing with more mundane issues such as whether all those £1 wagers collected in shops are being properly handed over to the Government.

The NAO should get down to the important issues more quickly. By next year the "good causes" boards will have spent nearly £3bn without making any of us much the wiser as to their mysterious workings.

Nor should the NAO be shy about suggesting new ways of making these boards responsive to public opinion: too many of them at the moment are staffed with bankers, politicians and businessmen appointed by ministers. We should stick with an old motto and demand – no spending without representation. A much wider review of who decides how lottery money is needed. The NAO investigation should be just the start of that inquiry.

Metamorphosis of the Existential Eleven



MILES KINGTON

determine the rest of their lives. In a story like *The Existential Eleven and Jackdaw Castle*, for instance, the 11 children are on holiday when they notice mysterious lights in the supposedly uninhabited castle opposite.

Initially tempted to investigate, after long discussion they finally decide to ignore the castle and carry on with publishing the philosophical journal for teenagers that they are trying to launch. Much later they find that the lights in the castle were caused by unauthorised campers, which seems to justify their indecision. Or does it?

The Sovereign Sixteen
Meeting up while they are on holiday, 16 children find that they are all named after kings or queens of England, and Descartes the dog – are always doubtful about the efficacy of action in any one context, and fearful of making the choice that will

Why are there lights at night in the windows of the abandoned castle on Pirate Island in Brid Bay? Together. Henrietta, Ethelred, Harold, Anne, Liz, Matilda, George, George II, George III, George IV, Edward, Arthur, William and Mary, Richard and Wallis Simpson the dog decide to investigate. They find to their amazement that the lights belong to a circus that is practising for the new season in secret on the island, and they are invited to join the circus as stable lads and trainee trapeze artists.

"Rather!" says Henrietta, who is actually a boy called Henry who would rather be a girl, and they all go off with the circus and are never heard of again.

The Suicidal Seventeen
This world-weary and rather despairing gang of girls and boys (plus Whiskers the dog, who hates being a dog and prefers to be thought of as a cat called Whiskers) are the heroes of an unlikely series of tales.

In these adventures, little caring if they live or die, the children tackle the most murderous types of villains in the most dangerous kinds of derelict castles. As their numbers gradually decrease, they start to reappear in other stories as the Fearful Fifteen, the Fatalistic Fourteen, the Throwaway

Thirteen and the Taciturn Twelve, etc.

The Eclectic Eighteen
An intriguing bunch of children who all go on holiday together but can never quite decide which method to use to solve the many mysteries they encounter. Some of them favour deduction, some lean towards intuition, while Jools (a girl who really wants to be a French兵团 called Jules) is all in favour of bursting in with guns blazing and asking questions afterwards.

Their most memorable adventure is in *The Eclectic Eighteen and Mystery Castle*, where they finally discover that the lights blazing in the supposedly empty castle were left on during the previous weekend by the Forgetful Fourteen.

The Narcissistic Nineteen
Perhaps the most unusual of all the Blytonian aggregations, this gang of children go on holiday together to indulge in a lot of preening and mirror activity, and are too bound up in themselves even to notice the blazing lights in the castle opposite.

The most unusual character is Dorian the dog, who stares at his reflection constantly and wishes fervently that he was himself, which he does not realise he already is.



Nurses never understand: their vocation is to work, ours is to make money'

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Practical preparations for Britain's ageing population

From Professor Michael Lye

Sir: Nicholas Timmins's report "Value of home should fund care in old age" and your leading article "Why didn't you save more, Grandpa?" (30 January) were unduly pessimistic in painting a picture of increasing and inevitable decline in our old age.

Old people become dependent and require nursing home support not because they are old but because they are ill. Our own everyday experience recognises that not all old people are helpless. Indeed, the majority are fit and well and living in their own homes. It is estimated that fewer than 5 per cent of old people in the UK require institutional care and this proportion is unlikely to change though, with increasing numbers of older people in the population, the absolute numbers in need of care will increase in the next century.

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Don't misjudge Europe's real mood



It may suit British sceptics to believe EMU is now an irrelevance – but it isn't true, warns Leon Brittan

A wave of wishful thinking, selective reporting and premature gloating is distorting Britain's perception of the European monetary union project just when we most need to keep our wits about us. Britain must decide at some time in the next few years whether it suits our interests to join a single currency or not.

It is on the pros and cons of joining that Britain's industrialists, politicians and ordinary citizens should be concentrating their thinking. Instead, we are effectively being told that we do not need to think about it any more for the deadline and the terms are unravelling, just as the British always said they would.

It is consoling to be told that you do not need to answer a difficult question, but it can be dangerous to duck out of it that way. Sound policy-making requires a much less self-serving view of what is really happening in Europe today.

The wishful thinkers argue that the voyage towards monetary union is finally hitting the rocks of economic reality as key Germans, French and other Euro-enthusiasts are voicing doubts about the timetable and, indeed, the very project itself. They gleefully point out that even the grand architects, former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and former Commission President Jacques Delors among them, are starting to admit the folly of their construction.

But hang on. Only yesterday Mr Delors said just the opposite: "Solemnly I say that any delay in applying the treaty [on EMU] would be a catastrophe, for European integration as well as for the management of currencies... to want to soften the criteria is counter-productive." And only two days ago, Giscard reiterated his determina-

tion to see the 1999 deadline respected.

Across the Rhine, Gunther Rexrodt, Germany's economy minister, said: "I am firmly convinced that we must adhere to the agreed plan with the start of EMU on 1 January 1999, and to the convergence criteria as they were agreed in Maastricht." The French and German governments have officially echoed this view as did most of the European Union's foreign ministers at their meeting on Monday.

According to ancient legend, the gods cursed Cassandra with the ability to predict future events but never to be believed. There is a tendency for the British to feel touched by the same curse when it comes to Europe, and never more so than now. The British have every right to their own views on the merits of the timetable of a single European currency. Indeed, the natural scepticism and pragmatism of the British are much-valued assets in the EU – they have helped see off unnecessary legislation in the past.

However, it is vital for Britain to read all the signals coming from the rest of Europe, not just those which fit the mood of the moment. The fact is that France, Germany and most other EU countries continue to be determined to start the single currency in 1999. As long as Chancellor Helmut Kohl heads Germany he will press on with this goal with rock-like determination. And he's a pretty formidable rock.

In France, what is significant is not that French plans to meet the convergence criteria led to strikes and demonstrations, but that the French government pursued those plans knowing perfectly well how unpopular they would be and has been continuing the same policy since the strikes finished.

None the less, it is reasonable to



Counting the cost: Jacques Chirac and Helmut Kohl are doggedly pursuing the economic reforms demanded by Maastricht to achieve a single currency

ask: even if the political will is still there, do the economic realities permit the goal to be reached on time? France and Germany have, for example, failed to bring their budget deficits under 3 per cent of GDP, as required by the Maastricht

wishful thinkers in Britain argue that the voyage towards monetary union is finally hitting the rocks of economic reality

able of taking the action necessary to make that possible.

For France it will be harder but by no means impossible. France has already cut its deficit from 6 per cent in 1994 to 5 per cent in 1995, and Prime Minister Alain Juppé's

same period of time. Admittedly, the economic climate is not ideal. Both Germany and France have announced packages to boost jobs, growth and confidence, but the small print in these packages shows that slimming the deficit still takes precedence over all else.

The British wishful thinkers believe the pressure to delay the 1999 deadline is now too strong to bear and that something must be done sooner or later. Some are publicly willing it to happen sooner, a tactic which is likely to be counter-productive and to have just the opposite effect in Germany and France, particularly if there is any suspicion of mischievous motives on Britain's part.

Opinion-poll gazers, too, who suspect that public support is slipping away, should be less selective in their choice of statistics. There is still majority support for a single currency in most EU countries

except the UK, Germany, Sweden and Denmark (where opinion is fairly evenly split).

Early in 1998 all the countries, including Britain, will decide, on the basis of economic data covering the previous year, who will join a single currency in the first wave and who will not. Some countries are likely to be eligible by then. Others would be happy to see a short delay, but only because they wish to join at the outset of EMU rather than in a second wave. Yet even they are enacting bold economic reforms to show that they mean to qualify for participation at the earliest possible date.

To postpone the starting date or weaken the criteria for participation would be to remove the pressure for reform that is leading so many countries to make the necessary structural changes which have been long delayed – and which would not take place without that pressure.

Those reforms are, in any case, necessary for Europe to be competitive. Whether you want a single currency or not, they make economic sense. That is why the British government has run the economy in order to meet the Maastricht criteria, even though Britain has not committed itself to join the single currency and only has an option to do so.

Having fought hard as a Treasury minister in Margaret Thatcher's team into the early Eighties to persuade this country to pursue sound fiscal and monetary policies, I find it particularly unedifying to watch Euro-sceptics ditching their own cherished economic values, indeed the values that have served this country so well for more than a decade, just because the dreaded M-word has attached itself to them.

The writer is vice-president of the European Commission

Who'll bear an unwanted foetus?

Anti-abortionists must face the consequences of their plans for embryo adoption, says Polly Toynbee

"Imagine walking down the street and bumping into your child's twin. You never knew she existed. You never wanted her to exist. She'd be a few years younger than my daughter, but her twin none the less. My child, my husband's child, our flesh and blood and yet not ours. The thought is abhorrent."

That was the reaction of one mother of a test-tube baby yesterday to the bizarre suggestion that spare embryos taken from women like her during treatment should be donated to infertile couples without her consent. These embryos were frozen for her own possible use if she later wanted another child. The idea of giving them to other people has been proposed by David Alton MP, the anti-abortion campaigner, together with a group called Comment on Reproductive Ethics (Core), which is non-religious although its founder, Josephine Quintavalle, is a Roman Catholic member of Life, the anti-abortion organisation.

Mr Alton wants any unclaimed foetuses to be implanted in other women's bodies without the genetic parents' consent. The overwhelming practical and legal problems seem not to concern him. Examining the language he uses, it is plain that he is not overly interested in the technical questions but in creating a legal and moral precedent. He proposes these "orphaned" embryos should be "adopted" by other infertile couples and even made "wards of court", as if they were infants left on the orphanage steps.

It is not difficult to detect the line of argument that underpins his plan. Although these four-cell embryos are so small that eight of them would fit on the full-stop at the end of this sentence, he believes they are children with all the same rights as born

children and he wants to establish this principle in law. If he were ever to succeed in having embryos declared wards of court, then of course embryo research and abortion would become untenable and that is his prime motive.

Before anyone gets too heated about this extraordinary idea, it is not going to happen, now or in any foreseeable future. It is the figment of a largely Roman Catholic and fundamentalist imagination, of those that seek to reopen the whole question of IVF treatment, embryology and abortion.

The reaction of one mother of a test-tube baby yesterday to the bizarre suggestion that spare embryos taken from women like her during treatment should be donated to infertile couples without her consent. These embryos were frozen for her own possible use if she later wanted another child. The idea of giving them to other people has been proposed by David Alton MP, the anti-abortion campaigner, together with a group called Comment on Reproductive Ethics (Core), which is non-religious although its founder, Josephine Quintavalle, is a Roman Catholic member of Life, the anti-abortion organisation.

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Mr Alton wants any unclaimed foetuses to be implanted in other women's bodies without the genetic parents' consent. The overwhelming practical and legal problems seem not to concern him. Examining the language he uses, it is plain that he is not overly interested in the technical questions but in creating a legal and moral precedent. He proposes these "orphaned" embryos should be "adopted" by other infertile couples and even made "wards of court", as if they were infants left on the orphanage steps.

It is not difficult to detect the line of argument that underpins his plan. Although these four-cell embryos are so small that eight of them would fit on the full-stop at the end of this sentence, he believes they are children with all the same rights as born

which there are figures), only 160 used donated embryos; these figures are likely to have reduced sharply since then.

For beyond the question of principle, the whole notion is a non-starter anyway. There is a huge waiting list of infertile couples desperate for a donated egg, to which the husband's sperm will then be added to create an embryo. The shortage of eggs is hardly surprising: not many women are willing to undergo the drugs and the operation involved in donating an egg, and many do not like the idea of

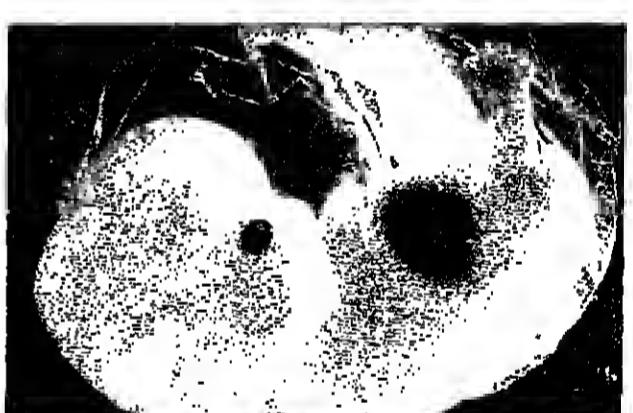
lege, London's IVF unit. When embryos are collected, the healthiest are implanted fresh into the mother's womb and have the best chance of succeeding. The rest are frozen. In other words, frozen embryos are second-best embryos.

So who would want to "adopt" Mr Alton's foetal "orphans"? Not, it seems, the infertile. Who else, then? The only likely candidates might be those who, like Alton, regard them as God's children, destined for murder unless saved by implantation in a vacant womb.

I have a modest proposal: teams of Catholic nuns should step forward and volunteer for these immaculate conceptions. "Save a Foetus for Jesus" could be the rallying cry for all those who believe that from the moment of conception, a unique and immortal soul is created.

If the law or ethics committees were ever to permit it, it would be interesting to see how many anti-abortion campaigners would volunteer their wombs to save these frozen embryos. Many, of course, do not have wombs, because they are men. Developing technology may, before long, make implantation a possibility but until then will they volunteer their wives, sisters and daughters? If they honestly believe, as they say do, that an invisible embryo has the same right to life as any living human being, then they should feel duty-bound to bear successive of them. If they honestly believe, as they say do, that an embryo's right to life supersedes a mother's wish not to bear it, then they should give up their wombs in the same way that they seek to force other women to.

In the meantime, the language of "orphans", "adoption" and "wards of court" has no place in the freezer of IVF clinics.



An embryo at seven weeks

Science Photograph Library

COULD YOU BE A MORE INSPIRING LEADER?

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Nursing the sick – and grudges

ANOTHER VIEW

Roy Lilley

treatment of hundreds of thousands of patients. He or she will work 11 hours a day with evening and weekend meetings thrown in for good measure. Were this work done in the private sector, the salary would be more like £120,000; in the NHS it is merely £65,000.

Managers' contracts of employment, calling for performance, pro-

ductivity, hours of work "commensurate with requirements", are short term and subject to termination on the flimsiest of grounds. Managers have never gone on strike, threatened to strike or organised themselves into a trade union.

Nurses are the opposite. The RCN has ditched its "no-strike policy" and last year threatened to withdraw co-operation, plunging the NHS into industrial-relations chaos, terrorising vulnerable patients. Nurses' contracts of employment are enshrined in binding national agreements that give cradle-to-grave protection. The RCN has

seen to it that performance and productivity are words no nurse ever need worry about. It threatened a strike last year if any hospital trust had the temerity to try to attach performance to nurses' pay settlement.

Who are the angels? Is it the nurses who manipulate public opinion and weak politicians with threats, rhetoric and intimidation, or is it the real spirit of public service in the hearts and minds of managers who make a creation nationalised industry work for lower wages than they are worth and more grief than they deserve?

The writer is an associate at the Centre for Health Services Management, University of Nottingham.

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ARMY OFFICER BE THE BEST

The survey revealing senior NHS managers had pay rises of 7.6 per cent has provoked a predictable response, the most vocal from the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), whose members, on average, enjoyed a 3 per cent increase in the same period.

The RCN would persuade us that nurses care about patients and managers do not. The RCN tell us their members are poorly paid, and ignore the fact that nurses, compared to any other work group, have enjoyed the largest percentage increase in earnings since 1979, 41 more than 120 per cent in real terms. The RCN demanded, and got, an independent pay review body, and now they don't like the results.

Prince leads field in race to buy Savoy hotels stake

JOHN SHEPHERD

Prince Al Waleed is rapidly emerging as the favoured candidate among the powerful Wontner family to buy the big stake in the Savoy group of hotels inherited by Granada from its £3.9bn takeover of Forte. Shares in the Savoy have risen sharply in recent weeks to value the group at around £600m.

"The Wontner family are happy to do a deal with the prince at the right price," said a source close to the family last night.

He added that the prince were keen to sit down and talk because "there are indications from Prince Al Waleed that he is intent on retaining the present management at the Savoy and retaining the status quo with the family."

The Wontner family controls a crucial 48 per cent voting share of the Savoy, principally through four trusts set by the late Sir Hugh Wontner, the company's former chairman. Granada owns 68 per cent of Savoy's equity, but only holds sway over 42 per cent of the votes because of the company's two-tier share structure.

"Only a nut will try to do a deal over the Savoy by talking to Granada before talking to other shareholders," the source said.

Forte spent 13 frustrating years trying to gain outright control, but every forceful move to secure ownership of the Savoy was firmly seen off by the Wontner family which found little difficulty in mustering support

from other shareholders. No formal offer for the Savoy stake has yet been tabled, but any formal financial proposal is likely to come through the prince's representatives at the United Saudi Commercial Bank.

Questions about the future home of the Savoy shares was yesterday met with a firm "no comment" by a spokesman for Granada.

Alan Fort, finance director of the Savoy, also declined to comment on the situation. "When we have something to say we will issue a press release and then talk to you," he said.

While many people made a great deal of noise about how they would like to own the Savoy during the Granada takeover fight, with Forte, sources in the City said yesterday that the firm list of potential buyers can to no more than six names, most of which were American.

They include Ritz Carlton, the hotels company which is 49 per cent owned by Marriott, and ITT Sheraton. However, a leading hotel industry analyst said that ITT had a "great deal on its plate" and would find it difficult to do a deal.

He added that Marriott would run the risk of "seriously damaging" its relationship with Whitbread, which last year paid £180m cash for 16 Marriott hotels in the UK, by taking any move by Ritz Carlton.

The fabulously wealthy 38-year-old Prince Al Waleed Bin Talal Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud is said to view an investment in the

Morton lashes at Government over tunnel

RUSSELL HOTTEN

Sir Alastair Morton, co-chairman of Eurotunnel, is today due to launch a strong attack on government failures that have brought the Channel Tunnel project to the edge of collapse.

In a conference speech, Sir Alastair - who will be followed immediately by the Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine - will accuse politicians and civil servants of renegeing on promises.

Baroness Thatcher, the political driving force behind getting the project launched, is said to have missed "the blindingly obvious" when dealing with the financing. And Treasury officials are said to have "cotton wool" under the ears.

The speech, seen by the *Independent*, says that similar large-scale projects should never again be financially structured in the same way.

While the contractors built the tunnel and banks arranged financing, Sir Alastair says the development ran into difficulties because there was no real client at the outset. "An immense stress was welded into the heavily loaded structure," Sir Alastair says.

Problems were compounded by Mrs Thatcher's demands that no public money should be put into the project, and a lack of government investment in the UK's infrastructure.

Mr Thatcher, he says, "was, of course, guilty of an extraordinary form of tunnel vision. She could not see the blindingly obvious" - that the tunnel was no more than a major link in a chain of public sector infrastructure: the road and rail systems of the UK and continental Europe. Thus, her project was only capable of flourishing with investment in appropriate physical and administrative infrastructures on both sides - something the French will understand."

Eurotunnel, currently renegotiating its £5bn of debt with its 225 banks, has had calls for state help rejected. But Sir Alastair, referring to the public finance initiative, said similar large capital projects will only succeed if "it is possible to blend public purse and private capital in them." This was a novelty that had not yet sunk into "the acid-soaked cotton wool between the ears of Treasury civil servants," Sir Alastair said.

"Eurotunnel is currently making clear to the British and French governments that certain promises have not been delivered and restitutions need to be disclosed.

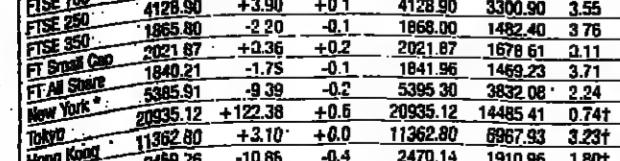
So again, the Channel Tunnel structure is revealed to be incomplete, but the lesson to be learned is clear. Unless Her Majesty's Government delivers its side of the PFI bargain, an excellent initiative will founder."

The speech may prove embarrassing for Mr Heseltine, who is speaking immediately after Sir Alastair and is expected to reply to some of the points.

Meanwhile, yesterday the European Investment Bank, believed to be Eurotunnel's largest creditor, said it remained "fully committed to the success" of the company.

Sir Brian Unwin, the EIB's president, told a press conference in Brussels that the bank was "substantially" committed to what he called "this great international project".

STOCK MARKETS



Source: FT Information

Standard considers NatWest bid approach

DAVID HELLIER and JOHN EISENHAMMER

Standard Chartered Bank, the UK-based bank with strong Asian business, is believed to be considering an informal approach from NatWest Group which could lead to merger discussions.

It follows talks between NatWest chairman Lord Alexander and Patrick Gillam, Standard's chairman.

City sources say that an internal bid committee exists at Standard, which takes advice from Schroders and Goldman Sachs. Insiders say the committee has discussed a target £11 a share which would secure the board's unconditional approval for a merger.

Banking analysts, however,

have said that shareholders in Standard Chartered would seriously look at any bid that was pitched at around £8 a share or more. The current share price is hovering above £8.

Standard Chartered was making no comment yesterday on the speculation.

A bank spokesman would not deny on the record that there had been discussions between his bank's chairman and the chairman of NatWest.

The spokesman pointed out that the first opportunity the bank would get to answer specific questions about its future would probably be later this month when the bank puts out its annual results.

Analysts are expecting profits of between £600-650m from Standard Chartered, against

£510m last year, when the bank reports on 20 February.

Some experts have suggested that NatWest would be unlikely to make a move because it could not absorb a large write-off of goodwill. The book value of Standard at the end of 1995 was £1.7bn, leaving it with goodwill of some £4.6bn at the current share price. NatWest sold out of its American retail operation, Bancorp, recently at just 1.4 times book value.

However, an all-share merger would get round the goodwill write-off problem. A corporate finance insider said a deal could make strategic sense for NatWest, because of the corporate business between Europe and the Far East, and the fact that Standard Chartered offered growth through acquisition.

Standard's current share price was down 4p yesterday at £31p. The bid speculation has put the bank on a relatively high rating, although the attraction for NatWest or any other bidder is that its large business in the Far East gives it tremendous potential for future profits growth.



In talks: Patrick Gillam, chairman of Standard Chartered

Sharp rise in consumer credit

DIANE COYLE
Economics Correspondent

New evidence of rapid growth in consumer borrowing yesterday highlighted concerns about the longer term prospects for inflation expressed by Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England.

Separate figures showed that new orders for consumer goods were a bright spot in Britain's still-subdued manufacturing industry, suggesting that the Chancellor's predicted consumer recovery is under way. The amount of new consumer credit in December leapt by £797m, the second highest monthly increase on record, following a £600m rise in November.

Credit card borrowing set a new record, rising £276m during the month.

Last year saw the biggest increase in consumer loans since the series began in 1987. At

£7.5bn it exceeded the pace of increase during the late 1980s boom.

Both Mr George and Kenneth Clarke, Chancellor of the Exchequer, have recently expressed concern about the rapid growth of money and credit. In minutes of their December meeting, released earlier this week, the Governor gave it as a reason for advising no more than a quarter point cut in interest rates in order for inflation to fall below its target some time during 1997.

However, Bank of England figures confirmed earlier reports from banks and building societies that net mortgage lending fell slightly in December to £15bn between 1994 and 1995.

This compared with £1.3bn the previous month and £1.5bn a year earlier. Total housing loans fell by 22 per cent to just over £15bn between 1994 and 1995.

House prices rose in January for the sixth month in a row, according to the Halifax Building Society, but the increase was only 0.1 per cent. Prices were 1.2 per cent lower than a year ago.

"Our optimism about a recovery is still tinged with caution," said the Halifax, the biggest mortgage lender, while the Britannia Building Society said yesterday its mortgage lending had dropped 24 per cent last year.

The overall index of activity fell from 50.8 in December to 50.2 last month - only just above the 50 watershed between growth and recession.

Output growth fell to its lowest since October 1992 but mainly because capital goods manufacturers were running down stock levels.



Source: Bank of England



Source: Bank of England

Recession signals as US inflation hits 10-year low

DIANE COYLE
Economics Correspondent

Clear signs that the US economy might be heading for recession - along with the lowest headline inflation rate for a decade - vindicated the Federal Reserve's decision on Wednesday to cut interest rates for the second time in two months. Analysts said further evidence of economic weakness would bring further reductions in interest rates.

France yesterday followed the wave of international interest rate cuts, reducing its main money market rate from 4.2 to 4.05 per cent. The Bundesbank stepped into the money markets to trim its repo rate to 3.3 per cent, down from 3.4 per cent earlier in the week.

The survey of American industry carried out by the National Association of Purchasing Managers (NAPM) showed that activity slowed worryingly in January. The index fell to 44.2 from 46.0 in December and now stands well below 50, the dividing line between recession and growth.

Christopher Low, an economist at James Capel in New York, said: "This is the first of the big indicators to point in the direction of recession."

He said there would definitely be further reductions in the cost of borrowing. "The Fed has had to become a lot more receptive to signs of economic weakness."

The NAPM predicted that employment in manufacturing would continue to fall for the

Investment: Ride the Misys roller-coaster

Toys 'R' Us forced into \$270m shake-up

Market Report: Tesco left on the shelf

22

22

23

Winded: Failure of asthma treatment sends shares on a roller-coaster ride



Drug scare: Three of the Celltech directors who benefited from the exercise of options in December, Peter Fellner (foreground) with (left to right) Peter Allen and David Bloxham, and former director Iain Ross, who left before the sales took place

Celltech drug let-down hits biotech babes

MAGNUS GRIMOND
City Editor

Shares in fledgling biotechnology companies had a roller-coaster ride yesterday after the announcement that Celltech, a leading player, had abandoned a key anti-asthma drug.

Celltech's shares plunged 163p to 518p after the group revealed that a joint study with the US drugs group Merck of its CDP 840 compound, originally billed as an important advance on current inhaled anti-asthma drugs such as Glaxo's Ventolin and Becotide, had failed to meet expectations.

The announcement comes just over seven weeks after four Celltech directors netted £3.5m from cashing in share options. But Dr Peter Fellner, who made around £2m from the option sales, yesterday defended the actions of the four men. "We went out of our way to undertake the option exercises in a completely above-board way, while retaining large stakes."

Dr Fellner said that after preliminary results were released on 6 December, they knew no further public statements were due to be made for a couple of months, when the clinical results on the CDP 840 trials would be announced.

The brokers Cazenove and the company's other advisers said it would be appropriate to move at that time, given the limited exercise period. A two-year "lock-in" period on directors' holdings ended on 9 December and the closed period began again in early January.

The announcement is the first seriously bad news to hit the sector since British Biotech unveiled "promising results" for its Marimastat anti-cancer drug at the end of November and sent shares soaring. Dealers marked the sector down sharply yesterday, before prices staged a recovery.

Of the bigger stocks, Celltech touched 488p at one stage, before bouncing back. British Biotech slid to £18.55 but ended

10p off at £21.13 and Scotia came back from 563p to 603p, just 7p down on the day. Few analysts saw this latest setback, which coincided with news that British Biotech had successfully raised £47.5m from the exercise of warrants, as marking the end of the boom in the shares.

One said: "This is definitely not the death of the sector ... but all this should drive home to the stock market the inherent risks in drug development."

It seems certain to hit confidence surrounding Celltech.

forseeable future. The employment index fell sharply to 44.3 last month, pointing to the possibility that the crucial monthly employment report due today would be weaker than expected.

Firms surveyed by the NAPM reported higher stock levels for the third month in a row.

Separate figures confirmed that inflation is not a concern in the US. Consumer prices increased by 0.2 per cent last month, a smaller than expected rise. The only significant price increase was in energy, due to the unusually cold weather. Oil prices have already fallen back from their mid-winter peak.

The rate of inflation fell from 2.6 per cent to 2.5 per cent in the 12 months to December, the lowest year-on-year rise since a 1.1 per cent increase in 1986 when oil prices collapsed. The core inflation rate - which excludes food and energy prices - was unchanged at 3.0 per cent in December.

David Bloom, an economist at James Capel in New York, said: "This is the first of the big indicators to point in the direction of recession."

He said there would definitely be further reductions in the cost of borrowing. "The Fed has had to become a lot more receptive to signs of economic weakness."

The NAPM predicted that employment in manufacturing would continue to fall for the



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THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

Edited by TOM STEVENSON

Cash in on Misys roller-coaster

Since 1991, when in keeping with many other companies it was blown off course by recession, Misys banking and insurance software house has been an impressive performer. Over the past five years, earnings have grown at a compound rate of 41 per cent and the dividend by 13 per cent a year.

That hasn't stopped investors enjoying a pretty rocky ride, however, with the shares falling from over 500p to 300p in 1994, before doubling again last year. Record profits for the half-year to November yesterday sent the stock 62p higher to 637p.

That sort of roller-coaster effect is misleading because Misys is a solid company, with a wide geographical spread and good recurring income, operating in fast-growing markets. Part of the volatility relates to the acquisition almost a year ago of ACT which doubled the size of the company and set nervous investors fretting about possible, unspecified "black holes" in a business that had issued a string of profit warnings.

Pre-tax profits for the six months to November of £19.2m (up from £11.2m) showed those concerns to have been unfounded. ACT appears to have been well-integrated and does not appear to have diluted one of Misys's big attractions, its ability to turn profits into cash. Borrowings in the year fell from £12.4m to £5.9m and should be eliminated by the year-end.

One of the problems with Misys, from the stock market perspective, is that there are few companies with which to compare it. Internally, it measures itself against mainly US competitors.

But with 55 per cent of profits coming from banking software packages and a further 30 per cent from insurance program business, Misys is exposed to some of the fastest-growing segments of a computer business that is itself undergoing the early stages of a massive revolution.

In banking, Misys has a strong position in emerging markets such as South-east Asia, eastern Europe and India, where the creation of banking infrastructure and deregulation is leading to enormous volumes of work. With 24 overseas offices, and 25 per cent of revenue already from emerging markets, Misys is better placed than its peers to benefit from these trends.

There are also enormous opportunities in the insurance business, where increasing competition from direct insurers is forcing the pace of automation (and so cost-cutting) at existing broker networks.

After better-than-expected half-year figures, the company looks well-positioned to meet forecasts of between £48m and £52m pre-tax profits in the

year to May. Even the bottom end of that range implies earnings per share of 42p, up 20 per cent on last year. At that rate of expansion a prospective price/earnings ratio of 15 looks a bit mean. Still some value to go for.

Tough times at Vibroplant

Vibroplant, the small-ticket plant hire group, is going through a bad patch at the moment. No sooner had it announced earlier this month that it was getting shot of its problem US division than it revealed the worse-than-expected effects of torrid trading on its UK business.

Yesterday, Vibroplant slipped what looked like a profits warning with the circular announcing details of the £68.8m sell-off of its American Hi-Lift division. The company said that since it announced interim profits 14 per cent higher at £3.68m in November, trading conditions have continued to deteriorate in the UK and this will be reflected in results for the second half.

As a result, James Capel, the house broker, yesterday slashed £1m off its forecast for the current year, leaving it at £3.7m, and cut next year's from £3.3m to £2.6m. With the shares diving 11p to 86p yesterday, the price now

represents 16 times 1995/96 earnings and over 21 times those for 1996/97. These are heady multiples and only a yield of 5.8 per cent, assuming last year's 4p dividend is held, is providing much support for the shares, along with the 51 per cent stake held by the family of the chairman, Jeremy Filkinson.

The dividend prop looks firm at the moment, even if the payout will only just be covered by earnings this year. The US sale will leave it with £20m of cash at a time when it needs to increase capital expenditure on its plant to compete with well-capitalised rivals and it should be able to take advantage of distressed sales of smaller groups to increase market share.

More worrying for investors is the company's distress at a time when market leaders Ashtead and Hewden-Stuart seem to be weathering the construction recession with much more aplomb. Times are undoubtedly lean, but Vibroplant seems to have been unnecessarily distracted by its problems in the US, while a switch to greater centralisation of its depots in the UK seems to have resulted in some loss of volume.

Its concentration on road building and civil engineering, which accounts for over half of turnover, is a serious weakness in the current environment of Government cut-backs and delays to the private finance initiative. Ashtead's two deals announced on Wednesday will reduce its dependence

on these areas to below 40 per cent and will only increase Vibroplant's difficulties in the City. The Filkinson family may wish to rush for the exit through an agreed takeover, but that looks some way off yet. Unexciting.

ERF a dwarf in land of giants

Things are not looking good for ERF, Britain's last remaining manufacturer of heavy trucks.

The group, based in Cheshire, has been slinging it out with manufacturing giants such as Volvo, IVECO-Ford and Mercedes and has managed to carve out a market share of between 9 and 10 per cent. But the strain is starting to show.

Yesterday the company issued an announcement about the re-structuring of its South African subsidiary but tagged a profits warning on the end. The shares, which stood at more than 300p last autumn, slumped 25 per cent to 182p.

ERF's continuing problem is its over-exposure to the UK market which accounts for 80 per cent of its sales. That market has been extremely difficult and in December and January ERF had to put its workers on a three-day week due to a 40 per cent slump in orders.

ERF says that the order in-take has picked up a little and the export business is also improving, particularly in Africa and Europe where the group launched a new range at the Paris Show last autumn.

Production is up to four days a week but the British market for heavy trucks remains fragile so the prospect of a return to full production looks slim.

All this has had a dramatic effect on sales and profits. Analysts have slashed profit forecasts from £2.6m for the current year to just £1.6m.

In the past two years ERF has moved into France and Spain but the group needs to diversify more to spread its risk.

At least borrowings will come down after the company raised £2.3m via the re-structure of its South African interests. ERF used to own 56 per cent of its South African subsidiary.

It is now selling part of that stake to another South African partner, Dorbyl. The group's bankers are hacking the group and have extended their facilities to March 1997.

But even after yesterday's crash the shares trade on a forward rating of 22. ERF still looks a dwarf in a land of giants and the shares are best avoided.

John Willcock CITY DIARY

'Drivel' charge in travel insurance war of words

The very essence of their advertisements intimate that with a Barclaycard, all sorts of disasters are automatically fully covered. This is simply not true.

Barclays did not feel like rising to the bait again yesterday. A spokesman merely replied as above. Whether Barclays will take any kind of legal action against WorldCover has not been decided.

"It's not for me to say," said the spokesman.

Archie Norman, the cherubic chief executive of Asda, has scooped the Retailer of the Year award - sponsored by NatWest Securities - with a thumping 41 per cent of the vote. Mr Norman travelled down from Leeds to accept the award and his prizes, which included a signed football (Mr Norman regularly turns out for the Asda football team) and a Leeds United replica shirt with his name on the back.

Appropriately for a man with rumoured political ambitions it also bore the number 10. But in a speech that was almost presidential in its polish Mr Norman

expressed nervousness about his prospects given the fate of previous winners, who include Sir Ralph Hulbert and Gerald Ratner. "None of them are in jail. Some are still employed. One or two are even doing quite well," he said. Even so, sell Asda.

Staying with the fontie theme, Peter Middleton, who moved recently from the helm at Lloyds of London to the even more lucrative pastures of Salomon Brothers, faces a cruel choice this weekend. He is a life-long Middlesbrough supporter, yet has recently been spotted presenting post-match awards at Chelsea.

Chelsea chairman Matthew Harding is a good friend of Middleton, who now lives near the ground. On Sunday 'Boro' take the coach down to Stamford Bridge - so which team will he support? Middleton was keeping his head well down on the subject yesterday.

14 February is St Valentine's Day. Disturbingly, it is also National Impotence Day. Whatever can this mean?



If you work for an investment bank, watch out: Eddie George is going on the piste. A chill wind blew through the Square Mile yesterday as word spread that the Governor of the Bank of England is about to embark on a week-long skiing holiday almost exactly a year after another ill-fated trip to the slopes - rudely interrupted by the collapse of Barings, the hue-and-cry merchant bank.

It was on Sunday 26 February that the fateful decision not to bail out Barings

with public money, since the £800m-plus losses from Nick Leeson's derivatives gambling had not been capped. Just days before, Mr George had arrived at his ski chalet when he received news of the crisis, and was forced to fly back without having been up a chair-lift. Bank staff are confident, however, that the Governor's imminent trip to Avoriaz in the French Alps does not signal a repetition. No doubt Chancellor Ken Clarke wishes him a safe journey down the black runs.

NOTICE TO INVESTORS

National & Provincial Building Society hereby gives notice that the annual rates of interest payable on the following accounts, with effect from 2 February 1996, will be as indicated below:

Name of Account	Minimum Balance £	Gross Interest Rate %	Net Interest Rate %
Instant Reserve	1	1.00	0.75
Under 16s receive	250	1.25	0.93
£500 rate for £1 to £500	500	2.60	1.95
	2,500	2.80	2.10
	5,000	3.10	2.32
	10,000	3.60	2.70
	25,000	4.00	3.00
Private Reserve	500	3.35	2.51
Annual Interest	5,000	3.55	2.66
	10,000	4.25	3.18
	25,000	4.80	3.60
	50,000	5.05	3.78
	100,000	5.15	3.86
Private Reserve	500	3.30	2.47
Monthly Income	5,000	3.50	2.62
	10,000	4.17	3.12
	25,000	4.70	3.52
	50,000	4.94	3.70
	100,000	5.04	3.78
Investment Reserve	5,000	4.85	3.63
Annual Interest†	10,000	5.25	3.93
	25,000	5.50	4.12
	50,000	5.75	4.31
	100,000	6.00	4.50
Investment Reserve	5,000	4.80	3.60
Monthly Income†	10,000	5.19	3.89
	25,000	5.43	4.07
	50,000	5.67	4.25
	100,000	5.91	4.43
Treasurer's Reserve	1	1.75	1.31
	500	3.15	2.36
	5,000	3.40	2.55
	10,000	4.00	3.00
	25,000	4.45	3.33

*The gross interest rate shown is the rate payable without taking account of the deduction of income tax. **The net interest rate shows the gross interest rate after the deduction of income tax at the basic rate (currently 25%). Gross interest rates quoted for Investment Reserve include 1.50% gross extra interest payable on 1 June each year (or on the first of each month for monthly income option) provided that withdrawal conditions are met and balance remains over £5,000.

All other variable rate accounts not specifically mentioned in this notice remain unchanged.

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Toys 'R' Us forced into \$270m re-structuring

DANIELLE ROBINSON

New York

Toys 'R' Us, the biggest toy retailer in the US, is closing 25 stores world-wide and taking a \$270m charge against fourth-quarter 1995 earnings in a bid to stay ahead of increasingly aggressive competitors such as Walmart.

The company said its charge would cover the cost of a restructuring that involves dumping less popular toy lines and overhauling inventory, closing 15 stores in the US and 10 in Europe, consolidating three distribution and seven administration centres world-wide and making accounting changes costing \$24m.

Michael Goldstein, the company's chief executive officer, said the move was aimed at increasing profits in 1996 and beyond, raising return on equity and improving cash flow. "We believe that between the reduction in our cost structure and the benefits anticipated from repositioning our merchandise offerings, the restructuring should provide at least a \$50m benefit to operating earnings in 1996 and a greater amount in 1997 and thereafter," Mr Goldstein said.

Based on preliminary results, Mr Goldstein estimated 1995 operating profits before the restructuring charge to be about \$590m for the fourth quarter and \$740m for the full year ending 3 February.

That would equate to earnings per share of about \$1.30 in the fourth quarter from \$1.46 in the previous corresponding period and about \$1.50 for the full year (\$1.85).

The re-structuring comes as Toys 'R' Us, once hailed as a trend-setter in the international retail industry with its idea of providing low-cost specialty supermarket chains selling only toys, was suddenly being threatened by general retailing giants

such as Walmart.

"This restructuring is an overdue move," said Sean Gowen, retail analyst at Gerard Klauer Mattison in New York.

"The most important issue in this industry is retail competitive pricing."

Toys 'R' Us dominated this business based on lower prices, but in the last five years Walmart, Target and Kmart have become bigger factors and even more competitive on price - particularly Walmart and Target because they use toys to help build traffic for the whole store. In many instances they sell toys at cost.

Walmart is the second-largest toy retailer in the country and growing faster than Toys 'R' Us.

The inventory overhaul will save Toys 'R' Us money and rid its stores of cluttered aisles. Instead it will focus on products with the greatest impact on consumers.

Trade Indemnity agrees £177m offer from French

JOHN EISENHAMMER

Financial Editor

Trade Indemnity, the British credit risk insurance company, has agreed a £177m cash offer from the French Compagnie Financière SFAC, continuing the international consolidation in the sector.

The offer is 97p in cash a share. SFAC's biggest shareholder is the French insurance company, AGF, which owns a direct 49.9 per cent stake.

The main company in the SFAC group specialises in domestic credit transactions in the French commercial market.

Trade Indemnity is a UK market leader in the provision

of domestic short-term trade credit insurance and has a growing export credit insurance book.

Both companies have reacted to growing demand from customers for cover outside domestic areas of operation.

"Our clients are becoming increasingly global in the scope and scale of their operations. It is essential that the credit insurance industry develops to meet these demands," said John Bishop, chief executive of Trade Indemnity, who will join the new group's management board.

"We have

SPORT

FA suspend drug abuser for one year

Football

Roger Stanislaus, the first player to be caught using a performance-enhancing drug in two seasons of post-match tests, is likely to be sacked by Leyton Orient after being banned for 12 months by the Football Association yesterday.

The FA demonstrated its determination to be tough on drug abuse by imposing a suspension on the 27-year-old defender that is four months longer than its ban on Eric Cantona for kicking a fan. It is the toughest punishment imposed by the FA on a player for 30 years.

An FA spokesman, Steve Double, said: "The FA has a clear responsibility to protect other professionals from players under the influence of drugs. Players who use performance-enhancing drugs also cheat fellow professionals who do not use stimulants."

The decision was backed by Orient's chairman, Barry Hearn, and the players' union, who attended the three-hour disciplinary hearing.

Stanislaus did not comment on the outcome, but Hearn, the snooker and boxing promoter, said: "I am very disappointed by anyone [who uses drugs] and I am totally opposed, as the club is, to any form of drug use or abuse both in society and sport."

He added: "There will be an

emergency board meeting next Tuesday morning."

The club is likely to announce the action it will take against the player immediately after that meeting.

Brendan Batson, assistant secretary of the PFA, supported Stanislaus but he also said: "There is no place for drugs in

the club.

He told the three-man commission that he took cocaine socially on the Thursday before the game. However, medical evidence was presented to the three-man commission that if he had last used the drug on the Thursday it would have taken a fatal dose to produce the results that showed up after the game.

The FA explained in a statement that Dr David Cowans, the director of the Drugs Control Centre at King's College, Chelsea, had told the disciplinary panel the test result was consistent with a typical dose of cocaine being taken between one and six hours prior to the test sample being produced at 6.40pm on the day of the game.

"Dr Cowan gave uncontested evidence that in order to produce the results obtained on Saturday, he [Stanislaus] would have to have taken a lethal dose of more than a kilogramme of cocaine," the statement said.

On the basis of that evidence, the FA decided the drug had been used to enhance performance, so there was no question of the sort of leniency shown to Paul Merson and Chris Armstrong, who were given education and rehabilitation.

Of last season's failures, eight were for cannabis, two immorally-taken cold cures and two cases of amphetamines.



Stanislaus: Social use claim

football. This is a serious case and is reflected in the punishment."

Stanislaus, a former apprentice at Arsenal, was suspended by Orient when the club heard the result of a random test following a 3-0 defeat at Barnet on 25 November.

He is not the first player caught using drugs. Last season there were 12 positive results from 272 tests, but all were either the result of taking med-

ication or social abuse of drugs. Stanislaus is the first accused of using drugs to boost performance.

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THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

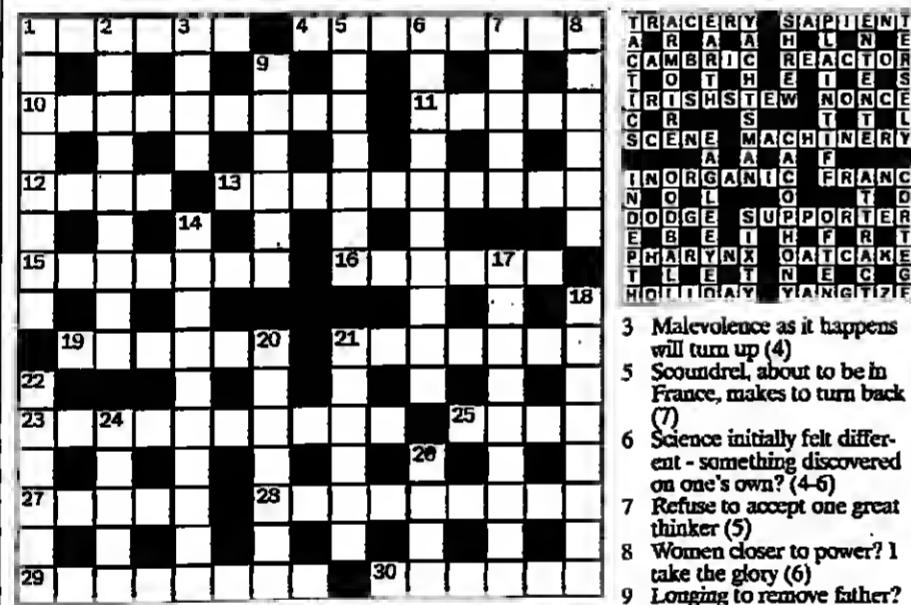
in association with



No.2899, Friday 2 February

By PHM

Thursday's Solution



ACROSS
 1 Show film to vet? (6)
 4 Weapon with flaming front part? (5-3)
 10 Inattentive about money (but not spending it on alcohol) (9)
 11 Inclined to take in one of the staples of education? (5)
 12 Student with attitude for study? (4)
 13 Dabbling? One permitted it in poet (10)
 15 Variation in Messiaen incompletely Oriental? (7)
 16 Tropical bird - trace tailless one (6)
 19 Live on edge? (6)
 21 One who doesn't believe a robbery will secure it (7)

DOWN
 23 Decides the playing - no football match was ever like this! (5-5)
 25 Relax - stop jettisoning leader (4)
 27 Custer repelled squid's assailant with iron (5)
 28 Bitter, twisted CIA longed to apprehend one female (9)
 30 One boxing ring? (6)
 1 Smooth water left in a disturbed state (8)
 2 Decline that is surrounding guy? Activate the college bar! (9)

Win a Weekend Break or a case of Bombardier Premium Bitter

CALL 0891 311 017

When you have the answers to the first three clues across AND the first three clues down phone 0891 311 017 and leave your answers with your name, address and daytime telephone number by midnight tonight. Each day there is a £1000 prize for a Weekend for two in a Charles Wells Country Hotel. Calls cost 35p per minute, cheq rate 40p per minute, other rates. Calls will be selected from the first 1000 entries received. No cash alternative. Normal Newspaper Publishing rules apply. Editor's decision is final. Winners' names can be obtained by sending an SAE to - Charles Wells Crossword, Unit A, Bowe House, St Peters Road, Maidenhead SL6 7OU

£40,000 to be won

See Page 26

KEVIN BOWRING

Wales expects

Page 26

No monkeying around as Jones' nap is streets ahead



Daydream believers: a victorious Devy Jones (far right) and his daughter, Sarah, flank Digast yesterday

Photograph: Phil Smith/Sporting Life

Richard Edmondson sees a 50-year-old former teen idol roll back the years on the Lingfield sand

He has also appeared in a rather surreal movie called Head with Victor MATURE, but all this paled in comparison with success in the £2,968 (and 35p) Ontario Amateur Riders' Handicap (Class E).

"That's show business," he said on mounting after success in the final race. "That was one of the greatest thrills of my life."

And then the crowd drifted away. It was time for the last train to Victoria.

Carling returns to pragmatic line

Rugby Union

STEVE BALE

It has taken Will Carling one match - the defeat in France - for him to decide that, after all, he prefers winning to artistic content. After going to Paris declaring style to be paramount, by yesterday the England captain had changed his mind for tomorrow's game against Wales at Twickenham.

Thursdays has come by tradition to be Carling day during international weeks though, after all this time, 56 matches as captain over seven years and three months, both questions and answers are starting to run out. Each Carling briefing is now ritually preceded by

the insistence that his interlocutors stick to rugby rather than gossip.

So, yet again, style or substance, substance or style? What would Twickenham's 78,000 prefer in the new era of professional rugby as an entertainment?

"I would like to provide the crowd with a win; that's what they enjoy," Carling said. "I am of the firm belief, and always have been, that people go to Twickenham to see us win. I love running rugby, that's what we want to play, but more than anything I want to win."

There is a contradiction here with Carling's remarks 15 days earlier, on the eve of England's departure for Paris, when he said: "Our style of

play is more important if we are to be consistently successful against the southern hemisphere, than just focusing everything on winning another Grand Slam. If that was the case, we would have picked a different side."

How Carling knows that the choice would have differed is an intriguing subject, since yesterday he disclosed for the first time that since Jack Rowell had become England manager in 1994 the captain had not been involved in selection.

This demonstrates both how uncomfortably close Carling was to Rowell's predecessor, Geoff Cooke, and how comparatively distant he is from Rowell, who insisted that Carling was always consulted - as

indeed was Ben Clarke, the pack leader.

Where Rowell had insisted on Wednesday that it was time for the senior lieutenants to assist the captain by pulling their weight on the field, Carling himself did not see it that way 24 hours later. "Responsibility is with the whole of the team," he asserted, though, after the loosening with which England conceded defeat to France, Rowell had a fair point.

"We've had this discussion so many times," Carling sighed. "You can analyse why games are lost to the nth degree. Sure, there were some wrong decisions, but there were far more right ones. People will always make mistakes and I'm not one for dwelling on them."

I'm not pointing any fingers at anyone."

This is very decent of Carling, who ventures to suggest that this England team could ultimately emulate the rugby of the 1992 team, whose Grand Slam came accompanied by 15 tries.

"You get that through confidence, through a very stable side who've been together for a very long period," he said.

"It comes from a tremendous bond in the players, a trust and knowledge of what you are trying to do. You can't just throw that together, but I believe this side, with a bit of luck and experience, will be able to play very exciting rugby too."

Which is roughly what the Welsh are saying about their team, too.

Sri Lanka's role as host in the balance

Cricket

DAVID LLEWELLYN

Sri Lanka's role as co-hosts of the World Cup hung in the balance last night after the organisers said they are to review security arrangements and the International Cricket Council (ICC) announced that it is to monitor the situation over the next two or three days, following Wednesday's bomb blast which ripped through the capital, Colombo, and left at least 72 dead and hundreds more seriously injured.

In a statement issued yesterday, the ICC chief executive, David Richards, said: "The explosion in Colombo... is obviously a matter of concern to all

countries competing in the World Cup. I have spoken this morning to Mr Dalmiya, the convenor-secretary of Piclon [the World Cup organising committee] who has given an assurance that an assessment of the position will be carried out over the next two to three days."

Already two of New Zealand's top rugby provinces, Otago and Auckland, have cancelled two exhibition matches which were due to be played in Colombo on 8 and 11 February. That has deterred Leicestershire who are planning to prepare for their County

Championship campaign with a nine-day tour against top Sri Lankan opposition next month. Chief executive Tony Norman said: "Unless we get advice to the contrary the tour is still on. There has been trouble for some years now but most of that has been in the north and we will be avoiding that district."

Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs issued a warning to all its nationals to defer all non-essential travel. While it

may be debatable as to how essential a one-day tournament held every four years may be when compared with this week's

indiscriminate carnage in the country, Graham Habish, chief executive of the Australian Cricket Board, did say last night: "I expect every player will attend the training camp in Brisbane early next week and we'll talk further there. But if any individual player feels that he is not able to make the tour, then that decision will be respected."

It has been suggested by one player that Australia may forfeit their World Cup opening match against Sri Lanka in the capital on 17 February. The pace bowler Craig McDermott, one of a number of play-

ers to have received a death threat from Sri Lanka following an ill-tempered Test series in Australia added: "Maybe it puts all games in Colombo in jeopardy."

Zimbabwe and the West Indies are also concerned. Zimbabwe spokesman said: "I am not sure that we would forfeit... The one alternative that comes to mind is to maybe ask for... a contingency plan for an alternative venue."

England do not have a match in Sri Lanka but the Test and County Cricket Board is staying in touch with the Foreign Office, which will also be advising the West Indies. The Sri Lankan cricket board insisted last night that everything was going ahead.

A WRITER

The MALT

The MALT

INSISTS UPON COSTLY
PROMISES BARLEY TO ENDURE
WITH THE SINGULARITY
MAKES IT

PRIZE WINNING TASTE
MAKES IT

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